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MERYL

WILLIAM
TILLINGHAST
ELDRIDGE

1. Fiction, American

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" ' Please,' she cried, ' just let me draw a big deep breath and keep very, very still.' "—*Page* 173.

MERYL

BY

WILLIAM TILLINGHAST ELDRIDGE

Author of "Hilma"

FRONTISPIECE BY

JOHN RAE

NEW YORK

DODD, MEAD & COMPANY

1908

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To

MY WIFE

AUG 1907

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MERYL

"I would I were a painter, for the sake
Of a sweet picture, and of her who led
A fitting guide, with reverential tread
Into that mountain mystery. First a lake
Tinted with sunset; next the wavy lines
Of far receding hills; and yet more far,
Monadnock lifting from his night of pines
His rosy forehead to the evening star."

—WHITTIER

CHAPTER I

A MISSING SERVANT

THE little clubhouse, no more than a good big living room; a long open dining porch and kitchen beyond with sleeping rooms above, hung on the side of the hill among the trees and protruding rocks. There it nestled in its setting of primeval forest as a harbinger for him who would come to the pines and hemlock. Under its roof for the sake of the outdoor life, and now and then a fair catch of trout from a neighbouring brook, or a good string of bass from Winnepesaukee, whose island dotted surface could be seen below, spread out in all its grandeur, you might rest—either from the cares of a too mad winter's rush for wealth or the less meritorious drive for social aggrandisement.

Under the huge pines where the moss hung black-green upon the gray rocks, it looked cool and inviting, but down the slope to the right of the clubhouse, even so early in the morning, the sun fell on the open path and the heat radiated from the rocks and worn earth in zigzagging rays dazzling to the eye.

Far away over the trees—a long velvety stretch they were—one gazed out across where Winnepesaukee sparkled clear in the rising sun, the flash on its matchless blue a sure forecast of a hot day ahead.

"Tom," came a loud call from one of the upper rooms; "chuck out an extra towel, will you?"

A dark curly head poked itself around the corner of the building—the smile under the kinky locks was broad and white—and then the general factotum of the Hanover Club moved slowly into the open space before the broad porch to gaze up at the window above.

"Dat yer, Mistah Hernal'? All right, sah. Heah's yer towel," and the negro dodged back toward the kitchen, returning with the desired article.

Down the outside steps of the building Bob Hernald bounded, his full six feet and broad shoulders garbed in blue pajamas, his feet in moccasins, while after him came muttered threats as less wide awake members protested against such early hours.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, coming to a stop beside the negro cook. "It's going to be a corker!" His gaze followed the still tree-tops to the waters beyond.

"It sure is," Tom agreed, holding out the towel. "'Tain't no day fo' fishin'."

"Reckon not," Bob agreed, tossing the towel over his arm. With a nod he was off on a run for the ravine below, where a fair-sized stream, lingering lazily in its rush to the lake, formed a deep pool.

Back again from his morning plunge, he realised as he came from out the shade of the woods that the day was going to be a record-breaker, and so at breakfast he protested against any fishing.

"It's too blamed hot," he argued, gazing toward the

lake. "They won't bite, and besides, you'll frizzle out there."

"Right you are, Robert the Handsome!" Billy Dawson agreed from the far end of the table as he stretched lazily. "I'm going to hang out in a hammock, and pejams and a decent novel are all my attire."

A few dissented and the argument that followed as to the possibilities of the bass biting or no, and whether the chance of getting a good string was worth the exertion, waxed as warm as the day.

Frank Hemming for one was strong in his determination to go. Finally, as the dozen-odd men pushed their chairs back from the table contented inwardly, at least, with black coffee, bacon and eggs and real corn bread, Bob Hernald announced that he should run over to Wolfboro in his car.

"I've got a couple of tires coming up," he called out as the men scattered. "If any of you fellows are going fishing, get your traps and I'll take you down to the lake."

"I'm with you," Hemming agreed, "if you'll drop us at Black's."

"Black's or anywhere, only get going."

The cars were kept in a small building below the clubhouse, and soon a half dozen were piling into Bob Hernald's car, to be whirled off to Black's, where a launch could be found to take them to the fishing grounds.

Leaving his companions, Bob turned the car back

toward the main road, with the shouted promise to be back in time to get them to the clubhouse for supper.

The wood road that leads down to Black's is narrow and rutted, and the car made slow progress along it. Once out of the ruts, however, it shot ahead and mile after mile flew by to the steady hum of the motor.

Here and there through the trees glimpses of the lake could be caught; the rippling waters looking cool and inviting, and withal tempting, yet falsely so, for the sun was beating down mercilessly in the open. The thick pines arched over the road, while a rain two days before had laid the dust.

Wolfboro, Bob Hernald's destination, was a good three hours' run from Black's around the lower bay, and it was well on to twelve o'clock when the low squatty station and clustering village came into view.

The bustle and life, after weeks in the great woods, seemed to have a certain fascination, and he settled himself easily in his seat as he drew up at the platform to watch the hurrying crowd that came flocking from the cars.

A glimpse of daintily dressed passengers caught his eye, and the spirit of civilisation seemed suddenly to stir within him, lured from its hiding place by the bustling station platform and receding train. A slow waltz seemed a positive reality.

His gaze turned from the car, as the majority of those who had alighted were hurrying toward the steam-

boat landing below. Where before a bustling swarm had flocked and jostled, only one or two loungers and an old man and girl remained.

The girl caught his eye instantly. Dressed in a trim-fitting and positively appropriate brown frock, she made a picture to hold one's gaze. A broad low golden-brown hat covered the deep bronze hair drawn back low on the neck. She was tall—laughter seemed to lurk in her eyes—and the little heels beat a dainty, determined tattoo on the platform, seemingly to say she knew where and whereof she strode.

Out from under perfect brows her eyes fairly danced with life and pleasure. The station platform, the distant wharf all seemed to be considered in one quick glance, and the exclamation of pleasure as she turned to her companion brought a smile to Hernald's lips.

It was as if the world held much for her; that it was perhaps new and strange—at least, the view must be—for how else could one so fair find such pleasure in so prosaic a little village.

"It is beautiful," she whispered with a deep indrawn breath that set her bosom heaving. The voice was low and even, but with such a fulness that whispered of a perfect rippling laugh, that Bob stirred, his interest growing.

As her companion turned back to speak to the station agent the girl moved slowly down the platform. Then he noted she was older than he had first thought, older than her simple costume would indicate. As his eyes low-

ered before her frank look of curiosity, he noted the foreign cut of her skirt and boots.

There was no mistaking her now, and yet, in her dress there was a smartness, he frankly admitted, far too good to be anything but American, to his way of thinking.

The steamer marks on the bags with which the man came hurrying back seemed to confirm the boots and dress.

"There must have been some mistake," he heard him say, "for the carriage is not here."

"What shall we do then?" the girl asked, and her eyes again turned to the lake.

"It should be here any minute, miss."

In the words Bob placed the man as a servant.

"Where shall we wait?" the girl questioned half absently.

Before a reply could be made, a barefoot boy hurried up the platform to the two and spoke quickly to the man.

"He says the carriage has broken down, miss," the servant explained, and then Bob, feeling his curiosity had led him too far toward eavesdropping, leaped down and hurried toward the station to enquire for the tires he was expecting.

The express office was closed for the noon hour, so he turned back, and as he reached his car noted the girl and her servant crossing the street towards the one hotel Wolfboro supported.

Bob had suffered once at its hands, but, nevertheless, in this case was driven to its doors for lack of other accommodation, and so, with the dust and dirt of the ride removed, he presented himself at the wide doors of the dining-room, where a number of long, white-covered tables stretched down its matted floor, each as absolutely uninviting as the next. But at one of these—only two were prepared for the unfortunates—the girl he had noticed on the station platform was seated, and to a place directly across from her he was shown.

Then followed the meal—" dinner " in the vernacular of the town—with the major parts served in thick white bird bathtubs, assisting materially to the unpalatableness of it all.

During the coming and going of the dishes and the steady drone of the flies, he noted with some wonder the one opposite, whose evident embarrassment was marked by the colour mounting high on her cheeks.

As he glanced up once he caught a look from under quickly lifted eyelids that dropped again instantly, as if their owner had been perhaps over-bold, or wished so to appear. Yet again the high-held head, the mass of brilliant hair coiled low on the neck, and the deep brown eyes, seemed to be all of one with whom the downcast glances and marked shyness, were strangely out of place.

His appetite finally half appeased, he fled from the uninviting dining room with the intention of a return to the station for another search for his tires. Then the

distant click of the billiard balls drew him down a side hall, and before long he was busy in a game at which his skill aroused the deepest admiration of the village loungers.

It was close on to three o'clock before he recalled he had need to hurry, if he was to get back to Black's in time.

Down the hall he rushed, pulling on his coat as he went, to be stopped suddenly as a side door was flung open in his face. The girl he had noticed on the platform stood hesitatingly before him.

"I beg your pardon," she faltered, as he stopped. "I thought it was——"

He raised his cap and waited, for on her face there was not only a look of quick embarrassment, but an added one of anxiety not there before.

"Is there anything I——" and then stopped, feeling as if he could be accused of taking advantage of her mistake, when he should have passed on.

A look almost of relief flew to her eyes at the mere suggestion in his words.

"If you would—but——" and again he hesitated.

"If there is anything I can do?" he urged. There was no doubt in his mind that something was amiss. The soft foreign accent as the girl spoke seemed almost to say she was a stranger in a strange land, and his desire to be of service quickened as she stood there before him, hesitating, embarrassed, but withal more beautiful for the high colour on her perfect cheek. Out

from such a face, framed with glorious bronze hair, her eyes of hidden depths looked appealingly.

"You were at the station, were you not?" she asked, the colour deepening in her face even as she put the question. "Yes, I thought I recognised you," she went on as he nodded agreement, "and so perhaps—did you notice a man with me?"

"Your servant?" Bob suggested.

"Yes, Kendon," the girl cried eagerly. "Do you know him?"

"Why no," he shook his head slowly, puzzled by the question. "I simply heard him address you, and so I judged he was your servant."

"Yes, I see," the girl faltered, and the eagerness in her voice died down suddenly as she turned away.

"Can I—that is, let me do something?" he pleaded. "You are perhaps a stranger here, and if there is anything I can do——"

"No." She turned again, speaking slowly; as if hardly noting him at all. "No, I can only wait—but it does seem——" and suddenly she glanced up and over her face a troubled little smile, half plaintive, half doubtful, flashed—"it is a long time, isn't it—and I don't see why he hasn't come."

"Have you been waiting here ever since dinner?" he exclaimed in startled surprise, suddenly recalling that he had spent a good two hours over the pool table.

"It is a long while, isn't it? But perhaps——" Her face brightened again and the deep brown eyes flashed

almost merrily—" the stable is a long way from here. He went to get a carriage."

For a moment Bob studied the girl before him with perplexity.

" Do you mean," he demanded, as the facts suddenly dawned upon him, " that your servant left you here to get a carriage, and hasn't returned for you yet? "

" Yes," the face lighted and the deep brown eyes rested on him as the head lifted with a little toss of the chin. " Our carriage had broken down and he went to see about it or to get another."

" I see," he nodded slowly, recalling the bare-footed boy at the station. " Do you happen to know where your servant went to get the carriage? "

" He didn't say. But wait! " and one little finger was pressed against the red lips, which pouted in perplexity. " Kendon said—yes, he said he would go down the road to where our carriage was broken down—a boy brought us word it was broken down while we were at the station —and if he found it couldn't be fixed, he would come back and hire one. You see, we have quite a distance to go from here."

" Oh, I see," he drew a deep breath. " Most likely the carriage was much further away than he expected. He ought to be back at any moment."

" Yes, I suppose so." The merriment went out of the voice suddenly at the thought of waiting longer.

" If you would like me to look? " he suggested, moved by the tone. " He went down the road? "

"The boy said it was down the road. But—why you shouldn't bother. I am sure he'll be back quickly."

"So am I," he agreed with a reassuring smile, "but I'll run down the road a way and hurry him along. I've got my car right here," he explained as the girl was about to interpose objections, "and it won't take me but a moment. I'll tell him—what's his name?"

"Kendon."

"I'll tell him," he added with a merry smile and a nod of assurance, "that you don't like New Hampshire hotels well enough to wait in them for nearly three hours at a stretch. I'll get him quickly," and with another nod he was off down the hall.

Yet for all his assurance he was sorely puzzled, not simply at the absence of the servant, which hardly seemed explained by the broken-down carriage, but also by the manner of the one he had just left.

She was twenty-three at least, of that he was certain, and yet there was a shyness, a quick coming and going of colour in her face, an equally quick lifting and lowering of eyelids that might be expected in one of half her years, or, perish the thought—in a skilled diplomat in the art of false simplicity. But the anxiety her eyes betrayed—that puzzled him—while to add to the charm there was her beauty. As he drove the car on he could clearly picture her face framed in its masses of dark hair. He would lend what aid he could; he would know more of one so strangely met.

Past the station he sent the car and on down the lake

road that led straight from Wolfboro to Melvin, a good twelve miles beyond. Mile after mile flew by, and then suddenly he slowed down the car and looked about him. There had been no road branching off, and still he had covered eight miles without meeting any broken-down carriage; in fact, any carriage at all.

Could it be the servant had gone some other way? For a moment he hesitated, and then quickly swinging the car about started back toward the village.

At every farmhouse he stopped to make enquiries, but without avail.

Then at the foot of a short hill near the village a small unpainted house loomed up, and he slowed down there the put the same enquiry. A barefooted youngster hurried around the corner of the building as the car came to a stop.

"Have you seen a broken-down carriage?" Bob demanded, gazing down into the dirt-besmirched face which scrutinised him in honest admiration. It was something to be talked to by a man who ran an automobile.

"The one I told the man about?" the boy demanded eagerly.

"The one you—oh yes, it was you," Bob agreed with a nod of recollection. "You did bring the word, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir," the youngster dug his bare toe into the mud. "I fetched it, and the man went down there a long time ago." The boy pointed along the road.

"Went down there?" Bod demanded. "Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes, sir, fer he come along with me. He went down the rud and I'd 'a' gone with him only ma called me in."

"I see," Bob smiled. "So he was walking. Well now, how far down the road was the carriage?"

"I dunno."

"Don't know! I thought you said you told him it was only down the road a bit?"

"The other man told me that."

"The other man!" he turned in his seat. "What other man?"

"The feller that got me to go to the station. He told me to tell the man the carriage was broke, and then he slipped a *quarter* into my hand," and the boy produced the coin with a careful glance over his shoulder towards the house.

"I see," Bob agreed, studying the boy intently while strange thoughts hurried through his head. "And where did the man go?"

"I don't know. He jest told me to tell the other man that, and I done it."

"Of course," Bob nodded cheerily, "and you haven't seen the man you told about the carriage since he went down the road?"

"No, sir." The boy slowly shook his head.

To make sure, he swung the car about and

retraced the eight miles or so that he had covered before. It seemed a waste of time, and yet there was the boy's story, so somewhere down the road beyond the unpainted house Kendon must have gone.

Nowhere on the road were there any signs of an accident, and at the first farmhouse beyond where he had talked with the boy no one recalled seeing a man that answered Kendon's description.

Slowly he shook his head at the puzzle, while as the car raced back toward the village, the strangeness of the servant's actions faded before the thought of the girl waiting for him in the dingy hotel parlour.

CHAPTER II

MERYL SEWELL

With a rush he turned the car into the curb before the hotel and hurried up the steps.

"I've missed him somewhere on the road," he explained as the girl met him at the parlour door.

"You haven't found him!" she exclaimed, her disappointment showing plainly. "Oh, what am I to do?"

"But it's not so bad," he urged. "Something has happened that we can't understand, that's all. I can get you a carriage."

"But," she faltered, "I don't know where to go."

"Don't know where to go!" he stopped in doubt.

"No. You see," the girl hurried on as if eager to confide in someone. "Kendon knew, and he was taking me to my uncle."

"Yes, I see," Bob nodded, studying the face carefully and very certain he did not understand. "But you have some idea, haven't you? Your uncle lives near here, I suppose—that is, he must. Perhaps I know him," and then as he was about to ask for the same, he remembered he had not mentioned his own. Introducing himself, he explained quickly that he was stopping at the Hanover Club and how he came to be in Wolfboro.

"Can't I help?" he urged, "or perhaps you will wait until your servant returns?"

"But how can I?"

"But you don't know where you are going."

And then of a sudden the girl burst into a merry peal of laughter.

"Do come, Mr. Hernald, and please sit down while I explain. I must talk. You see, it's all so strange, and perhaps you'll listen."

"Gladly," he agreed, welcoming the opportunity to learn more of the one before him.

They found chairs in the dingy parlour, and for an instant the girl hesitated, as if undecided just how to begin. Her brown skirt was drawn tightly over her knees, her elbows on them, her chin rested in her hands. Then she glanced up half shyly and again the rarest smile in the world played across her lips.

"I've lived in Ireland—in a convent—all my life," she began, with sudden directness, "and my name is Meryl Sewell——"

"Sewell," he broke in with a start. "Is your uncle Gale Sewell of Wilderness Lodge?"

"Wilderness Lodge!" Meryl Sewell questioned. "Yes! Yes! That is it. That is what Kendon called it. So *you* know my uncle?"

"Why, of course," he agreed eagerly, as he moved forward. "He's a crazy old—I beg your pardon—he's an eccentric old gentleman. He has a place up on the Ossipees; calls it Wilderness Lodge. You are going there?"

"I was going to my uncle's."

"That's it. Why, Jack Marsden's place is there too," he hurried on. "Marsden's a great friend of mine, and I've met your uncle several times. He's got two thousand odd acres over that way. Marsden's got a strip beyond, and this way is the Hanover Club."

"I see," Meryl agreed, clapping her hands softly as she moved forward eagerly in her chair, her face brightening suddenly as she seemed to come upon one who knew all about her.

"And you were going there, of course, when Kendon got lost. But look!" He rushed on excitedly. "Why not let me take you there? It's only a bit beyond the Club, and I'm going over there this afternoon."

"But Kendon?"

"Oh, I'll leave word here for him. If he turns up he can follow. What's the use of waiting any longer," he argued gaily, feeling that the long ride back would have an added charm if only he could have this girl as a companion.

"But should I?" Meryl questioned.

"Why not—but, of course, it is odd. Yet what else can we do?" It seemed perfectly natural for him to couple their acts together. "You don't really know me, of course."

"Oh, no, I didn't mean that, Mr. Hernald," she cried, her face flushing a deep crimson and her little hand flying out in a gesture of protest.

"But you don't," he insisted; "yet if you'll go with me I'll be awfully glad to take you."

"But perhaps this Mr. Sewell isn't my uncle," she suggested.

"That's so," he agreed. "Yet he must be. You said the place was called Wilderness Lodge."

"Yes," she admitted, "but Kendon! I can't leave him."

"I'll write a note,"—he proposed letting no such small matter interfere—"and leave it here. When he turns up he can follow."

"That might do," she agreed.

"Do! of course it would," he urged. "You just want to get to your uncle's."

"Yes," she nodded, the colour deep in the perfect cheeks, "if you will—unless I'm troubling you. Perhaps you have some other place to go."

But he laughed gaily.

"I'm the most care-free body in this world," he announced. "Come! We'll wait no longer. I'll scribble a note to your servant. He left you here, and so, of course, he'll come back here to find you."

"But where can he be?" she questioned falteringly.

"That's beyond me," Bob laughed gaily, "but we won't wait." And without more ado he seized upon her luggage and carried it pell-mell to the street.

He helped her to a seat at his side, and with a touch life was in the car.

One stop was made at the station, to secure the tires he had come for, and then the long straight lake road was before them, Wolfboro behind.

"Your uncle's place is over there." He pointed as the road led by close to the edge of the lake.

Far across the wide expanse of the island-dotted waters could be seen on the farther side the rising hills of the Ossipees.

"We go around the lower bay," he explained. "On the first hill, where you see the bare spot cropping out, is the Hanover Club. Beyond is Wilderness Lodge."

"It is delicious," she murmured, "and the lake—I never saw anything half as grand."

"Winnepesaukee is a great old sheet of water," he agreed; "yet there are lots on the other side just as fine."

"I saw the Mediterranean, once," she replied.

The emphasis on the "once" made him glance around.

"Yes," he agreed, "it's a great deal bluer than Winnepesaukee."

"But this is more beautiful. The woods all about it and the islands—it seems like a fairyland."

"You should see one of our sunsets," he urged, "then the lake's perfect. When there's never a ripple on the water; when the depths take on the myriad colour of the sky and everything is as still as death. To go floating out in a canoe at such a time, just as the sun is sinking away, then it's at its best."

"And to where do you go floating, Mr. Hernald?"

He glanced at her quickly, as if to catch the real meaning in the speech.

"Oh, to an endless contentment," smiling gaily. "You float away and all your cares are gone, while your prospects are as rosy-tinged as the sky itself."

"I think that is how I have been floating," she spoke softly.

"And now you've come to America, to float on as happily in a new setting, that is all," he suggested.

"Perhaps," she admitted, and added: "But the introduction was not auspicious. One couldn't float serenely in that little hotel."

"It was a discord, truly," he nodded, "but not a lasting one."

"Thanks to you. Ah, but this is so different, after all," she hurried on. "You know, Mr. Hernald, I've lived all my life in a little convent. I've never been anywhere"—she turned to him and their eyes met—"except once, until now."

"You truly have had a floating time, and on quite placid waters," he agreed, longing to ask a dozen questions.

"Why, I never knew there really was a world like this. Of course, I've read—oh, such a terrible lot,"—the little pout at the thought of books and studies was a merry one,—"but when one only reads one can know but little."

"Of the world," he admitted.

"I was always kept in the convent. You see, I never had a father or mother at all. I just remember the gray buildings and the gardens, all surrounded by a

high stone wall. Then there were the Sisters, and that was all."

"For all your life?"

She drew herself up very straight and the side glance from her brown eyes had a merry, laughing, tantalising twinkle in them. "For my whole twenty-three years. See the gray hairs of piety?"

They both joined in the laugh, and the car swung around the curve and on into the deep shadow of close growing pines.

"Oh, how delicious!" she cried as the cool pine needle odour greeted her nostrils.

"The world has virtue, you see," he answered.

She nodded. "I think the world is really worth trying. When Kendon came for me and told me that I was to come to America, to my uncle's,—and I never knew I had an uncle before,—I didn't really think so at first, but now, when I've had a taste of it, I'm beginning to believe I've wasted my time."

He turned and looked at his companion curiously.

"Do you mean to tell me you've never been anywhere, that you——" But he stopped. She had, of course, said as much, but it seemed impossible to believe.

She nodded sagely. "Nowhere; but once, for my health, to Italy."

"But——" and then he stopped again. Someway, he who had travelled the world over, couldn't believe it.

"How could I?" She turned to him again. "I've

lived all my life in the convent, and when I wanted to go out anywhere, the Sisters wouldn't let me."

"Wouldn't let you?"

"They said I must not. I tried to rebel at first, but it was no use. They told me once that I was to live with them forever."

"And become a Sister?" he demanded, the horror in such an idea slipping into his tone.

"No, they said I couldn't do that—why, I don't know. I think, though, my father left me with the Sisters before he died, and it must have been he who arranged that I was to stay there always. Then my uncle found out about it and he sent for me."

Bob nodded absently. His thoughts turned suddenly to the contrast between Gale Sewall, old and eccentric, living in the mountains of New Hampshire practically the life of a hermit, and this girl, an absolute stranger to the world and its ways. To such a man she was going. Was it but the exchange of one prison for another? Gale Sewell never went anywhere,—unless to trail his brook for trout,—and hardly a soul came to Wilderness Lodge except the Marsdens.

And then the thought—he was a friend of Jack Marsden's, and if the monotony of her life in such a place could be lightened, he resolved to lend a hand.

As they reached the turn off toward Black's Landing, Bob suddenly recalled his friends.

Quickly explaining to his companion, he turned the car into the woods.

The waiting men heard it coming, and a wild shout of derision at his lateness greeted his ear as he swung into the clearing about the wharf.

Then the loud voices and calls stopped suddenly at the sight of the girl by his side.

"You can wait here," he suggested, when he had explained matters, "or there's old man Black, he can take you back."

"How long shall you be?" one questioned.

"To Wilderness Lodge!" came the exclamation from another, so loud that the girl could not help catching the words, "up that hill? Why, he won't be back for an hour."

But at last it was arranged they should wait, and so the crest-fallen group was left on the wharf.

"Always Bob Hernald's way," one declared. "A good-looking girl anywhere on earth that needs help, and he tumbles onto her in some way. Luck! Why, I can remember——" And as the others lighted up, Dick Burden proceeded to spin an account of one of Bob Hernald's many exploits.

The car reached the main road again and under the trees the long shadows were growing black. On it went at full speed, for before them the road led ahead a long, straight grade toward the mountains. The lake was to their left, and at another turn in the road behind them.

"I fear I should have waited at the hotel," she suggested in a pleading voice.

"We'll be there before long," he assured her. "The

road's a bit steep from here on, and rougher, too, yet we can make pretty good time. Certainly your uncle will be expecting you, so there'll be a bite waiting. The air does give one an appetite, doesn't it?"

"Yes," she agreed, "but your friends. They will be nearly starved by the time you get back."

"Do them good," he laughed, though he had failed to turn her thoughts from the over-loud protests of the men, which she could not have helped hearing.

"How much farther is it?"

"Oh, not a great way," he laughed. "You see, I can go back a-humming. The sand won't bother the car coming down."

With all his reasoning, he realised from the sudden silence that fell upon her, that he had not swept away the fears of having put him to some inconvenience. He wished then that he had not stopped at Black's at all.

On up the hill they climbed, and then the long mountain road fairly good, except for a stretch of sand now and then, was before them. Once they stopped to light the lamps, and so, with the four shafts of light marking the road ahead, they went on.

For a while the girl watched silently the dark pines spring into life as the long shafts of light from the lamps fell on them. It seemed like a ghostly picture—now bright, now black—touch and go.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "it's like a fairyland where the light falls!"

"It is!" he nodded gaily.

"Oh, I do hope," she exclaimed suddenly, "my uncle won't be sorry he sent for me."

"Sorry!" he cried with fine disdain for such a thought, and then the distant sound of an approaching car fell on his ears, and with a wild shriek from the siren he slowed down.

Around a curve in the road, perhaps a hundred yards ahead of them, a car swept and came on in a rush.

"Why, it's Marsden's car!" he exclaimed, and at the same moment an exclamation from one of its occupants was heard, while with grinding brakes it came to a stop.

"Hello! Who's that? Is that Miss Sewell you've got there?" came the call.

He stopped his car as about to turn out into the road again.

"Yes, what's wanted?"

No answer came to the question, but instead, one of the men jumped down and came toward them. In the darkness his face could not be seen.

When within a dozen feet he stopped.

"Is that Miss Sewell?" came the question again.

"Yes," he called. "What's wanted? Is that Marsden's car?"

"Marsden's car? No," came the sharp answer. "We're after Miss Sewell. Her uncle sent us."

With a word to his companion he swung to the ground and walked to where the man waited.

"My name's Hernald," he began, and then in a word he explained matters.

"I see," the other agreed. "Her servant's all right." Then he lowered his voice. "He's got drunk. Someone just 'phoned up from Wolfboro that he was in a bad way. Mr. Sewell sent us down at once."

"I see," he nodded.

"We're obliged to you, Mr. Hernald," the man added. "Now we'll just take Miss Sewell's luggage, and the lady, too."

"I can take her on. It's not much farther."

He turned back to where Meryl waited, but before he could explain matters, she spoke.

"I had better go with them. Your friends are waiting for you, you know."

"But it's only a step farther," he urged, not wishing to be cheated out of even the short distance left.

But she insisted upon the change, urging his waiting friends, and so, with as good grace as possible, he helped transfer her bags to the other car.

Then it turned and came up the road, and past his car some twenty feet before it stopped.

He helped her down, and as the man who had done the talking was standing close at hand, he turned to say good-bye at once.

Her face lighted at his suggestion that he might be passing Wilderness Lodge in a day or so.

"Oh, do!" she exclaimed, "and then my uncle can thank you as well as I."

He held out his hand and she took it quickly.

"I'll come," he laughed. "I'll come for the thanks."

He watched the man help her into the tonneau of the other car, and she turned to wave her hand to him. Then the man who had spoken before turned and hurried back.

"I'm Mr. Sewell's secretary," he explained, "and I couldn't help overhearing what you said."

"Well?" he questioned, eyeing the tall, well-built figure before him rather doubtfully.

"Well, Miss Sewell has"—the voice lowered—"has lived a strange life for one of her age, and she comes here to her uncle under peculiar circumstances."

"Well?" he questioned.

"Mr. Sewell is an odd man, and, of course, he'd be glad to see you personally, to thank you for what you've done, but from what I know I rather think the young lady will be kept very quiet, and——"

"And callers will not be wanted," he finished for the other. "Thanks. Give my compliments to Mr. Sewell. I can take a hint. Good-night!"

In the glare of the lamps from his car a pleading face with just a sudden touch of loneliness in the eyes watched him swing quickly to his seat.

He was the first man she had ever seen or talked to for any length of time in all her life, and he had been very, very kind.

CHAPTER III

THE DESERTED BUNK HOUSE

Two days went by, and Bob Hernald debated many times as to whether he should obey the injunctions of Gale Sewell's secretary or his natural inclinations.

He could be bold enough if the occasion demanded, but, nevertheless, there was a certain shrinking from embarrassing situations in his make-up, and so he hesitated. If he should present himself at Wilderness Lodge and find Gale Sewell coolly hospitable, and his niece nowhere in evidence, he would wish he had never gone. Yet, again and again came the picture of the tall girl in brown, the dark eyes that glanced up so innocently—the mass of gleaming bronze hair that formed a frame for a face chiselled clear as a die,—and he held back with difficulty.

He had been of some slight assistance to her when in distress, and surely, he argued, it would not be so very unbecoming to " drop in " to find how she fared now that she was safely housed.

Too, while fishing was a pleasant pastime, it became monotonous after a while, and the opportunity of a few hours now and then with his late companion seemed a pleasant prospect, not only to contemplate, but to actually enjoy.

Yet he did nothing for two days, and to one of his inclinations two days was a long time. It was quick action with him, as his friends could attest. When he paid court, and his court was never—or at least, had never been so far—more than the deepest momentary attention, he preferred to shower bonbons one day, flowers the next, a drive, luncheon, more bonbons, the theatre and, possibly some rainy afternoon, a browsy hour or two over a book of poems, for Bob Hernald was a bit of a reader and dreamer for all his sporting and outdoor inclinations.

Yet in this instance he waited, hoping inwardly that Jack Marsden would turn up,—though he knew he wouldn't,—for he could give him all the facts necessary in regard to Wilderness Lodge and its owner. But Jack was in England, somewhere, and so that quarter seemed hopeless.

Gale Sewell he had met twice on the upper end of Rock Creek, a fairly famous trout brook, and the second time the owner of Wilderness Lodge, accredited with all manner of peculiarities, had been good enough to remember the first introduction without a second.

Yet, weighing all sides of the question, he still hesitated and even on the third morning—when he had resolved the night before to set out at dawn for Wilderness Lodge—he weakened.

Instead, he joined a half dozen of the other men for a day's tramp up to Ball Peak, a bare spot of out-cropping rock on the face of one of the Ossipees.

They made a day of it, taking their time going up and a long rest in the late afternoon on the very edge of Ball Peak itself.

"Well, Robert," one of the crowd inquired as he lay stretched full length in the sun, his short, black briar burning furiously, "you've done pretty well, these last few days."

"But the germ's stirring," Dawson put in, catching the drift of the other's remark. "It's stirring! Bob will be off for his lady's castle pretty soon."

"Hasn't rushed in as quickly as I expected," Brooks laughingly added his gibe, "or have you sent down for some bon bons and a few dozen American Beauties?"

"I think, Bob," came the added advice from another lazy mortal, "that you should really go and dress up. Goggles aren't awfully becoming, even to you. And that flannel shirt—well, you look too much like a Wild West hero. Go get some glad rags on and toot over for the lady's inspection. You're too handsome to let your light shine under camp garb."

Bob turned his eyes lazily on the speaker and puffed easily on his pipe.

"Now don't you do it, Robert," Dawson advised. "A flannel shirt becomes you. Your hair's just a bit wavy, so it always looks in place. Those dark eyes, set in that ideal tan you've acquired—with your breadth of shoulders——"

"Anything more you fellows care to sling out?" the

object of all this interrupted with a laugh. "But go on, and when I do go to call on the lady I'll take no one with me."

A chorus of protests greeted the threat, and Frank Hemming shied a pine cone at Bob's broad back. "You're too good-natured. Why in hell don't you get fussed up a bit?"

"I might, if you knew how to do it." Bob laughed as he rose slowly to his feet and stretched himself like a lazy, good-natured beast. "Come on now and let's get going, or we'll be late to camp. It's nearly as bad going down as coming up."

"Yes, and it wouldn't do to be late for supper, would it?" Brooks demanded, thinking of his long wait at Black's three nights before.

"Not unless you've got a right good excuse, and that none of you fellows seems able to produce."

"I haven't any tires to chase," Dawson suggested, as he rose laboriously to his feet.

They made their way back, down the side of the mountain, at times half sliding along the steep slope of the path, at others picking their way carefully by the edges of sheer ravines where a mere slip would have given them a bad fall, if nothing more.

All about them the woods were deep and dense, the underbrush growing so close between the tall, straight pines that except along the path progress was nigh impossible.

Far below them the long broken stretches of the lake

lay like silver mirrors, while the stillness of the forest gave back their answering calls and shouts.

"Is it better than waiting for clients in a Broadway skyscraper, Bob?" Dawson demanded, as they came to a pause where the trees had been cleared away for a few hundred feet.

The one addressed nodded absently.

"Y-e-s." Another nod and a deep indrawn breath, as if his thoughts were far away. "Yes, though," turning with a laugh, "I never really tried it."

"No, I know you didn't," Dawson agreed. "You should have, though."

"I sometimes think you're right. Why the devil doesn't a fellow get in and dig, even if he doesn't have to? Now I've got *an office*, and you fellows use it for a quiet little game more than I do for clients. Why?"

Dawson's only answer was a laugh, as he turned away to join the others. He was in no mood to let his mind run to the settlement of such problems; in fact, his question had no underlying motive, not even mere curiosity.

Not so with Bob Hernald. The question of his willingness to go on without a set purpose often disturbed him, and it needed no more than the merest suggestion to stir his mind to a certain dissatisfaction with himself.

So he stood on the very edge of the path. Below, the ground fell away, and out over the swaying tree tops he looked to where a good three miles beyond the waters sparkled clear in the sun. A tiny speck of a

boat could be made out, moving across an upper arm of the lake.

Far to the right, the nearest stretch of the lake ended in Green's Basin. Straight ahead was Long Island, and then the Broads, while on the further side lay Weirs, and far down the lake to the left was Wolfboro.

Finally he turned from his silent scrutiny of the picture to find that his companions were making down from the clearing, following a steep path that led straight toward the water.

"Hold on!" he called. "You don't want to go that way. Take the upper path and follow along the ridge."

"This is as good as the other," came the answer.

Frank Hemming paused, being the last one.

"Let's take the other path, Frank," Bob suggested. "We'll beat them in."

Hemming turned and called to the men now well below them and out of sight.

"Go ahead then your own way!" came back the answer.

"Let them go," Bob nodded, half glad to be rid of the crowd and their banter, which suddenly seemed ill-fitting to the great stillness of the woods.

"The upper path it is," Frank agreed, and the two made across the clearing.

For a while they tramped on silently, Frank in the lead. Two clearings similar to the one where they had parted from the others were passed, and then they

turned from the road they had been following, and, taking a path that led off to the right, began gradually to work down the mountain side.

Another clearing was passed and then they entered a more open stretch where the high mountain blueberry bushes grew in rich profusion. A few bushes bore ripe fruit, and the two loafed along, picking handfuls as they went.

Suddenly both glanced up as a loud call came echoing through the woods.

"Did you hear that?" Frank demanded. He was standing listening.

"What was it?"

Before Hemming could answer, the cry was borne to their ears again. Loud, long, agonising.

"Come on!" Frank called, and with a bound raced through the rank growing bush and over the hidden rocks toward the path.

The cry had come from somewhere before them, and Bob leaped toward the path and in a minute was following his friend along it toward the woods ahead.

Again the cry rang out, and it was unmistakably that of a man, and one in great agony or danger.

The two had reached the wood, and raced on through the thick-growing pines for a hundred yards or so, when again the cry came, now more to the left and up the mountain side.

"Wait!" Bob called, and as he caught up with his friend he set up a loud "halloo"!

Again came the cry, but this time it was cut short, as if the one uttering it had been suddenly silenced.

"It can't be any of the fellows?" Frank suggested.

Bob shook his head, and with a spring dodged through the pines and up the mountain side, with his friend close behind him.

The wood-road was above them, and Bob Hernald's first thought had been that some picnicking party, or perhaps a crowd mountain climbing, had met with a mishap.

It was rough going up the hill, but finally they came out in the wood-road, both spent in breath.

"To the right," he nodded, as they paused.

"What's wrong?" Frank yelled, using his hands as a trumpet.

No answer came to the hail, and again he called.

"It must be this way," Bob panted, and the two set off on a run down the road which turned and twisted among the trees and at times was so rank with brush and young saplings that it was difficult to find one's way. At last, spent with their running, they paused again.

"What the devil can it mean?" Frank exclaimed as they slowed down to a walk.

The woods were still as death about them.

"It was certainly someone, and badly hurt, I should say."

"A man's voice, too," Hemming agreed. "But why

doesn't he answer or call again? He might be anywhere."

"We may have caught the echo," Bob suggested. "We were just below the sharp rise in the hill and he may be back of us."

They stood debating an instant, and then, as they were about to turn back, the cry rang out, more full of agony and pain than before, as if the owner was in mortal danger. It came from the right down the road, and so close at hand that the two started at its proximity before they sprung ahead on the run.

A dozen yards and the road turned sharply to the left, and the next instant they were in a clearing. On the further side stood an old tumbled-down shanty such as is used by the timber gangs when working on the mountain side.

The sight of a building so far up the mountain came as a surprise, and the two hesitated an instant. Then, with a shout of encouragement, they raced towards it. They reached the half-hung door, and Bob Hernald, who was in the lead, seized the hasp. But the door held.

"It's locked!" he exclaimed, and he stepped back suddenly.

"Halloa there!" Frank called. "What's wrong? Someone hurt? Halloa!"

No answer, and the two stood undecided.

Then as they glanced about in bewilderment, Hemming seized the other by the arm and pointed to the far end of the building.

"That shutter moved," he whispered, lowering his voice in suspicion. "See!" His grip on his friend's arm tightened. "Someone's there—they looked out."

"Are you sure?" Bob questioned, his eyes watching the window intently. It was only a square opening, two feet in size, and was covered by a wooden slide on the inside. Perhaps a dozen similar openings, each closed by a solid wooden shutter, appeared in the long side of the building.

"It's closed now," Frank answered. "What the devil's doing?"

For answer, Bob walked across to the door and beat a heavy tattoo on it with a stout stick he had seized from the ground.

"Come!" he called. "Open up, will you?"

Not a sound answered the summons. Waiting a moment he pounded on the door again.

"If anyone's hurt," he called, "we want to know it. Open up and explain. We heard the call and we saw you at the window. Come on, open up!"

A stillness like death seemed to settle about the old building as they waited for some answer. A squirrel, disturbed by their shouting, whisked out from under the floor and rushed away towards the woods. Both the men started at its sudden appearance, and Frank seized a stout club from the ground.

"Something's up sure. We——" And then before Bob could finish the sound as of a stick snapping came from the further side of the building. With a rush they

were around the corner, but only in time to see two men like fleeing shadows disappear among the trees.

With a cry they were off in hot pursuit. But the men had a good start, and in an instant were lost among the heavy underbrush.

"We can't catch them," Bob declared, as he ceased running. What in hell does it mean?"

"*They* didn't cry out."

"It must be someone in the shanty."

"Shall we go back?"

"Surely," Bob nodded. "Break in the door and let's find out what they've been up to."

Arming themselves with heavy clubs they hurried toward the clearing, coming out this time at the back of the building, to note a second door, which they made towards.

The building was perhaps a hundred feet long and thirty wide. Square openings had been made every few feet, but each one was closed with a wooden shutter. The door on the back and the one at the front seemed to be the only entrances.

The second door they found locked, a heavy hasp and huge padlock hanging on the outside.

"They slipped out this way and locked the door after them, while we were hammering away on the front," Bob declared with some disgust at being so easily outwitted.

"But what's inside?" Frank urged. "This old place hasn't been used for five years, at least. It was

that long ago they were cutting timber up here. It's part of Sewell's property, and don't you remember, he stopped them a year after granting permission to cut? There was a raft of talk about it."

"Part of Sewell's property!" Bob exclaimed. "Yes, I remember," he nodded slowly, as he ran his eye up and down the long side of the unpainted building.

"Well, let's get at the bottom of it," Hemming urged.

They started at one end and tried each window in turn, with no results. All were fastened firmly on the inside.

"You can't pry one open," Bob explained, as they stopped after making a circle of the whole place. "There's a pin on the inside and it's as good a lock as you'd want."

"Well, good Heaven, man, let's get in some way," Frank urged. "The damn place can't certainly be burglar-proof."

For a moment they studied the building, and then Bob seized upon a couple of large stones from a pile of rocks near by. Quickly he let one drive at the nearest window shutter and then the second after it.

A volley soon drove the shutter in, and with a spring they were at the opening.

"It's as black as night in there," he exclaimed, stepping back.

The two peered in, but only the meagre outlines of the bare room could be made out.

"Halloa!" Frank called. "Anyone there?" and they listened for a full minute, but no answer came to the hail.

Determined to get at the bottom of the mystery, they worked their way through the narrow opening and into the huge room. Then throwing open window after window and also the door at the front, they let the sunlight in, to reveal clearly a huge room lined with bunks between the windows, the floor a pile of dirty rubbish. Across the further end a rough partition was built.

"Nothing here," Hemming called as he made a hasty search of the bunks along the hall. "Let's try the other end."

They passed slowly to the door that led into that part of the building where the kitchen was located, with some uneasiness.

The cry that had aroused them still seemed to ring in their ears, while the sudden flight of the two men and the death-like stillness of the building and the silent woods about it was enough to put their nerves on edge.

Just an instant they paused at the opening and then both stepped into the kitchen itself.

A rusty old wood-stove was at the far end, and then, even before their eyes could turn to the farthest corner, a sound caught their ears, and both whirled toward the right.

Rubbish littered the floor, as in the main room, but in the far corner itself a heap of freshly cut branches was piled high. As the two turned toward them, they

moved ever so slightly. With a spring both were across the room, and with nervous hands began throwing the boughs aside. The next instant they uncovered a man, bound and gagged.

With a cry Bob Hernald straightened suddenly, for before him lay Miss Sewell's servant, clothes torn and dirty, and across the forehead a deep red welt where a whip or heavy stick had left its mark.

CHAPTER IV

PUZZLING FACTS

WITH quick fingers they tore the cords loose that bound the man and helped him to his feet.

For an instant he stood staring stupidly at them, and then his knees gave out and he sank a limp heap to the ground.

As they worked over him, Bob explained briefly to Hemming what he knew of the man, and then when he had regained his senses enough to move they led him to the open door and seated him on a box in the sunshine. The cool air drove a touch of colour into the pale cheeks, and he straightened slowly, drawing a deep breath. Then turning, he looked his rescuers over almost defiantly.

"Better take a drop of this," Bob suggested, offering his flask.

Kendon nodded and put it to his lips. As he handed it back, his eyes rested on Bob's face in a perplexed stare.

He was short of stature, but heavily built. His hair was almost white, and while well beyond sixty, under ordinary circumstances he looked much younger than his years. But now, the torn clothes, the deep red welt across the forehead and the pale cheeks made the old servant look his years, and more.

"Who are you?" he suddenly demanded, the dazed look leaving his face. As he spoke, his fingers slowly followed the swollen lines on his wrists where the rope with which he had been bound had left its mark.

"We were coming through the woods," Bob explained. "Did you cry out?"

"Yes," Kendon nodded. "They were killing me. Where did they go."

"Two men got away and ran into the woods while we were hammering at the door. But what does it mean? What are you doing up here and what were they doing to you?"

"You aren't in league with them?" Kendon demanded suspiciously.

"Hardly," Frank laughed. "This is Mr. Hernald; I'm Mr. Hemming, both of the Hanover Club."

At the familiar name of the Club, Kendon's face brightened, and then suddenly he struggled to his feet and stared about him.

"Where am I?" he cried, as he threw out his hand to steady himself against the building. "Where am I? How far is it?"

"Sit down," Bob ordered suddenly. He could well see that the man had undergone rough treatment and was hardly himself.

He was puzzled, too, to find him here on the mountain side under such circumstances, when he had last heard of him as drunk in Wolfboro.

"But where am I?" Kendon insisted, as he sank back on to the box.

"You're not far from Wilderness Lodge," Bob answered in a reassuring voice, "and we can get you there in short order as soon as you're able to walk. First, though, tell us how you came here and what those two fellows were doing to you."

"The Lodge," Kendon muttered. "How can I get to Wolfboro? I must get there at once. What day is it?"

"There's no need to go to Wolfboro," Bob answered, reading the servant's thoughts. "Miss Sewell is with her uncle, safe and sound."

For a long minute Kendon stared dumfounded at the tall young fellow before him, as if he could hardly believe his ears.

"Safe!" he muttered as his thin, nervous fingers stroked his cheek. "Safe! With Mr. Sewell. At Wilderness Lodge. Isn't she at Wolfboro?"

"No, she's not," Bob answered. "She's safe. I took her there myself."

"You!—You took her to Wilderness Lodge——" And then speech seemed to fail him and he could only stare, open-mouthed. Slowly he found his voice again. "You!" he muttered; "how do you know of Gale Sewell's niece?"

"I found her at the Wolfboro House, where you had left her. When you failed to return, I brought here over in my car."

"You took her in your car, sir?"

"Yes. I was going back to the Club—it was only a short distance from there."

"But she must have been alarmed. What did she think? Did she not wonder at my leaving her?"

"Somewhat," Bob agreed drily, "and now, perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me what happened to you. Of course, it's not my affair, but perhaps you'll not mind explaining how you came to leave Miss Sewell as you did."

For an instant Kendon hesitated, and then slowly he gained his feet and shook himself. New life and strength seemed to flow in the old servant's veins, and his spirits quickened at the news of his mistress's safety. He had undergone hard handling, but, though sore in many a bone, he seemed more himself.

"Can't we go on, sir? I must get to Wilderness Lodge as quickly as I can."

"Can you walk?" Bob demanded.

"Yes." Kendon glanced about eagerly. "Let's get away from here."

With some water from a near-by spring, he washed the blood and dirt from his face and hands, and putting his clothes to rights as best he could, he made a fairly respectable appearance once more.

"You're sure you're all right?" Bob insisted.

"They didn't really do me any harm, sir, only they twisted my arm. It's a bit lame now. They were trying

to make me tell them something, and when you came they bound me up and left me."

"Trying to make you tell them something!" Bob repeated, as the three, Kendon between them, started down the wood-road away from the clearing.

"They wanted me to tell them about some things," Kendon began, speaking quickly, "and I didn't know—that is——" And then he hesitated and ended somewhat lamely: "They tied a rope on my arm and twisted it. That was when I cried out."

Bob studied the man's seemingly stolid face in some doubt.

"Who were they?" Frank suddenly put in, speaking for the first time since they had started.

"I don't know, sir. I never saw them before. They brought me right here after they carried me off, and I've been here ever since. Two or three hours before you arrived they came back to me and tried to get me to tell——" And then sudden silence fell on Kendon again.

"You don't know who they are?" Bob repeated incredulously. "But surely you must have some idea."

"I never saw them before," Kendon insisted with great positiveness, shaking his white head slowly. As he spoke, his eyes never turned to the one he was addressing, but stared straight ahead of him with an almost vacant look.

Bob made up his mind that the man was still suffer-

ing from his experience and resolved to lead him carefully back over past events.

"Was the carriage broken down?" he demanded, turning toward Kendon to note his expression at the question.

The old servant's face never altered, nor did he even glance up.

"No," he answered slowly, "a wheel was off, but they did that—yet it wasn't the carriage I wired for. There is some reason in it. At first I thought it must be on account of Miss Sewell, but it seems it was I whom they wanted. I can't——" And then he stopped suddenly with a shake of his head.

With a shrug Bob glanced towards Hemming, who shook his head in perplexity, for to him the old servant was a puzzle.

Finally they reached the main road where they dropped on to a shaded bank, for Kendon had shown signs of fatigue. For a long while they sat there, the two talking quietly apart while Kendon sat stolidly silent, slowly twisting a bit of grass in his fingers. He seemed lost in thought, but as they were about to start on again, he turned to one and then to the other of his two companions, and for the first time raised his eyes from a constant study of the ground before him.

"I want to thank you gentlemen," he said, speaking slowly. "If it hadn't been for you, I should have—well, I don't know what would have happened to me. But, principally, for the help given Miss Sewell. The

thought that she was left alone in Wolfboro nearly drove me mad. What she would have done, had you not come to her rescue, Mr. Hernald, it is hard to say."

"She'd have waited a little longer, that's all," Bob put in. "Mr. Sewell had sent for her."

"Sent for her?" Kendon questioned with a perplexed stare. "Sent for her?"

"Why, yes. Someone sent word that Miss Sewell was left alone——"

"Someone sent word? I don't understand."

"No more do I," Bob agreed a bit sharply, for he was beginning to lose patience with the riddle. "All I know is that just as Miss Sewell and I were a half-mile or so from Wilderness Lodge, we met another car, headed down the mountain. Mr. Sewell's secretary was in it. He said someone had telephoned that you had met with an—er—accident. They were on their way to Wolfboro."

"Mr. Sewell's secretary? Mr. Sewell has no secretary."

"Well, this fellow so names himself. Perhaps he was a groom or a gardener or something. At any rate, he was in the car with two other men, and they knew you had met with an accident and that Miss Sewell was stranded in Wolfboro."

Kendon's eyes had fastened on the other's face as he spoke, and for a long time he continued to stare as if he neither understood what had been said nor could quite make out the speaker.

"It might have been Mr. Marsden's car; Mr. Sewell hasn't one."

"Perhaps it was," Bob agreed, "though I doubt it, for I asked them if it was Jack Marsden's, and they said no."

"Mr. Jack's car was there before I left," Kendon agreed, still seemingly speaking as if he were groping for his words. "Yet what does it mean? What does it mean? Who would have telephoned to Mr. Sewell? Who could have called himself Mr. Sewell's secretary? I don't understand—I can't make daylight out of it. I don't know how anyone could have found out about—about——" And then as he hesitated his lips closed tightly as if he were afraid he would say too much.

Already the sun was close to setting and the long twilight would be on them before long. Bob glanced at his watch.

"If you're ready to go on," he suggested, "we'd better start; it's getting pretty late."

The old servant rose slowly and started down the road with a weary nod. His walk was mechanical, as had been his words. The two men exchanged glances, and Frank shook his head as he tapped his forehead.

"No, I don't think so," Bob answered, as they slowly followed Kendon who, for the moment, seemed to have forgotten them completely. "There's something underneath that's deeper than we think. He was evidently carried off by these men and they've been trying to get some information out of him. Remember what he said

about their wanting him to tell them about something? He's been worrying over Miss Sewell, and that, with the other, has got him dazed. I doubt if he really knows what happened to him. And, too, I think he's a little afraid of saying too much to us for fear of letting some secret out of the bag. If he told who the men were, or why they carried him off or, in fact, said anything about it at all, he'd have to tell the whole story, and that he doesn't want to do."

"But how about the telephone message?" Hemming suggested.

"Perhaps they had a sense of chivalry about them, so telephoned to Wilderness Lodge, not wanting to leave Miss Sewell stranded all night."

"Hardly plausible, but as good as any explanation one can make."

"Rather, when, in fact, one can't get head or tail of the whole business, with what little light we have now."

"And no more seems available, at least, not out of him," and Frank nodded toward the short, broad-shouldered little man before them, who was trudging along, hat in hand.

"I wish to thunder Jack Marsden would turn up. I'm frankly curious over the whole thing and would like to get some facts. He's thick with Sewell; at least, his father is. They were old college chums, and Marsden's Sewell's legal representative. Jack would know the inside."

"And furnish a means of meeting the Lady Simplicity," Frank added, with a laugh.

"Did I call her that? Well, she is. Oh, laugh, but you meet her once and see. Why, she knows nothing of the world, but she's as charming. She is——"

"So you've said. When does Jack come back?"

"I don't know. He's too uncertain to count on. He likes old Winnepesaukee well enough, though, to turn up at any time. The last letter I had indicated a home yearning had begun to stir within him somewhere."

"You might wire that a charming mademoiselle has dropped suddenly from the skies, to become mistress of Wilderness Lodge. He'd bite."

"Yes, I dare say he would." Bob nodded, as they stepped ahead to Kendon's side.

At last they drew near to the cross-roads high up on the mountain side. To the right the road led down toward the Hanover Club, while to the left was the way to Wilderness Lodge.

"You weren't such a long way from home, after all," Bob suggested as they stopped.

"No," Kendon agreed, turning to look down the road in the direction of Wilderness Lodge. The sound of an approaching automobile could be heard.

The three slipped back toward the side of the road as the car came down on them. It drew up suddenly. In the gathering darkness two men could be seen in it. One was in the tonneau, and as the car came to a stop he threw open the door and stepped down.

"Kendon!" His voice was deep, attention compelling in its tone. "You here? Why, man, what's happened you?" Then his eyes turned. "Ah!" he exclaimed, with some surprise as he noted the other two—"Mr. Hernald."

"Mr. Marsden!" Bob grasped the extended hand. "This is my friend, Mr. Hemming."

The lawyer shook hands and then turned quickly back to Kendon.

"What in the world are doing here?" he demanded. "Where have you been, man? When did you land and what has happened?"

"When did I land!" Kendon exclaimed. "Did you not get my wire?"

"Wire? We've had no word from you—not even when you sailed."

"No word!" Kendon mumbled, bewilderment showing in voice and look, and then suddenly, as he hesitated for words, a swift change—one of alarm—crossed his face. "But Miss Sewell, she has explained."

"Miss Sewell!" Marsden repeated. "Did you find Miss Sewell?"

"Find her!" Kendon almost shouted; "of course I found her. I wired that I had. We got to New York Saturday. I wired you from there. We reached Wolfboro yesterday and I was carried off, I——"

"You were carried off!" Marsden broke in. "What do you mean?"

"What I say," Kendon rushed on, his words tumbling

one upon the other. "I was carried off. These gentlemen have but just rescued me—they can tell you. But Miss Sewell! Why—this gentleman brought her to Wilderness Lodge."

The two had been standing speechless as the old servant rattled on, but now as Marsden turned toward them, Bob stepped forward.

"Why, yes," he agreed. "By chance I came across Miss Sewell in Wolfboro, and I found out who she was. Kendon had disappeared, and so I brought her over in my car."

For an instant Marsden looked the three over in blank amazement, as if they, and possibly he, were bereft of their senses.

"Brought her over!" he finally demanded. "Brought her over! To Wilderness Lodge? Why, man, there is no Miss Sewell at Wilderness Lodge."

CHAPTER V

A TORN GLOVE

WILDERNESS LODGE was the wonder place of the country side. Years before Gale Sewell had come to New Hampshire, a hundred spots being named by the gossips as the place from whence he had hailed, and, purchasing a tract of two thousand odd acres of wild mountain land, begun the erection of a house and the laying out of grounds.

Roads had been built; underbrush cut away, and a dozen acres made into a cultivated park and woodland, while through the forest and woods, left wild as before, the drive and roads had been extended.

In the middle of the park, a mile, easily, from the public road, he had begun to build. From his own grounds he had quarried the rock, and slowly the house had grown.

It was a huge, low, two-story building; in parts, the first story running clear to the roof, and as soon as the first few rooms were completed he had moved in, with his one servant.

Then for years the building went slowly on, the work being superintended by Gale Sewell himself, and proving a means of occupation for his mind and body.

With his own hands he finished some of the rooms. At times, with a trowel borrowed from one of the masons, he laid stone upon stone.

Then parts already completed were town down, the lines of the building changed and once again the slow work went on.

As a means of occupation for the owner, Wilderness Lodge proved eminently successful. He took rare pleasure in the task, though why he could wish such a huge, rambling house no one was able to say.

But to Gale Sewell, the work seemed never finished. One wing was simply completed when new plans were devised and another begun. He was his own architect, his own designer, and he consulted no one in the work but himself and his personal whims.

Thus until tired, he kept at the task, and finally the building stood a gray pile of wandering wings and towers, a perfect labyrinth of two hundred odd rooms. Some were furnished and some were empty, that was as the owner had pleased. The stable, as elaborate as the house, stood vacant, except that a number of men employed on the place lived in it.

The gardener's house, an electric light plant, a huge icehouse together with a shop and laboratory made up the out-buildings, without counting a half-completed tower started some five years before and located on the crest of a high knoll, a good half mile through the wood to the north of the house.

It was, however, the main building that excited the

curiosity of the country-side, and about it and its owner strange tales flew fast and never ending.

The building, strange to say, was shrouded with more mystery than Gale Sewell himself. He had, it seems, been set down years before as a rich man desiring to live in retirement, and so dismissed.

But the house—acknowledged as his hobby—was made a place of deep mystery. It was big enough to have, as it was credited with having, mysterious rooms, secret passages and hidden stairways. Why they existed no one could say, unless because no man would build a home of such size on the ordinary plan.

The furniture of the rooms was credited with being as rich as that adorning an Eastern palace. Pine boxes and crates had come to Wilderness Lodge soon after it was finished, and many had borne foreign marks. This in itself was enough to set a quiet New England country-side talking.

Some of these tales were known to Bob Hernald, and while many were discredited by common sense or by Jack Marsden, still, even to him, an air of mystery shrouded Wilderness Lodge and its tall, gaunt gray-haired owner.

It was thus with a feeling of suppressed excitement, a good deal increased by Mr. Marsden's statement that Miss Sewell had not reached her destination, that he found himself within its portals.

Frank Hemming, though stirred to as great a curiosity as the other, had gone on to the Hanover Club,

while Hernald and Kendon had joined Mr. Marsden, and with him had hurried back down the road, the car put to its best speed.

At the huge doorway, flanked with heavy stone columns, they paused for an instant at a sign from Marsden.

"Mr. Sewell," the lawyer began, turning to Kendon, his deep voice carefully modulated, "is ill—very ill. Doctor Bashton is with him. We must go into this matter of Miss Sewell at once. Mr. Hernald, will you step in?" and slipping a key into the front door he threw it open.

They entered a huge, square hall, two stories high, with a wide balcony running about the second floor. The walls were panelled in a dark wood, and huge pillars with half-arched brackets supported the balcony. At the far end a wide staircase led upward, and at the right a fireplace of rough stone could be seen. The whole struck one as tremendous in its proportions, while each detail was massive and, if anything, overheavy.

The lawyer led the way toward the left, and throwing open a door almost hidden in the dark paneled wall, touched an electric button, sending a shower of light over a long, low-ceiled room lined with book-cases well filled with volumes.

About the room huge chairs were scattered, while in the centre stood a table of tremendous size. On it a broad lamp threw a flood of light over books and maga-

zines, so brilliantly lighting the table itself that the balance of the room seemed in shadow.

"I believe in a proper condition at all times," Marsden suggested with a smile, as if endeavouring to put his guest at ease. "Kendon, you look as if you needed a bite yourself. Send in some cold meat and something to drink. I have brought over James and one of my other men since Mr. Sewell was taken ill. Let them serve us, and as soon as you have eaten come back."

Kendon, who had hardly spoken a word, hurried from the room, accepting Mr. Marsden's suggestions—they were made as suggestions, Bob noticed, not given as orders—as unquestionable, while he himself dropped into an easy chair by the table. He felt glad that he had at last come upon someone who would undoubtedly explain much that seemed most puzzling just now, and also he was not sorry to find himself at Wilderness Lodge, where his thoughts for the last few days had rested.

Though he had roomed with Jack Marsden at college, played on the 'Varsity ball team, and rowed in the same crew with him, he really knew but little of Marsden Senior.

He had met him before, many times, but never for more than a word. Now he studied the solidly built figure before him with interest. In the father he could see many traits he knew well in the son. The two looked somewhat alike, and yet it was really little more than a passing resemblance.

The man before him was short, with square shoul-

ders, as was the son. The high forehead was there, but yet there was a harder, sharper look in the father's face. It was due, no doubt, to the years, and, too, to the work, for Henry Marsden was noted as a clever handler of knotty, legal tangles.

"I feel that I know you very well," Marsden began, as a tray well laden was placed before them. "We've met, of course, and, too, Jack has spoken of you so often —you and he are pretty close."

"As close, I think," Bob agreed, "as I am to any man."

"Exactly," Marsden nodded as he passed over a plate of meat and pushed an ice cold bottle of beer toward Bob's hand, "and that's why I've sent Kendon away for a moment. You're naturally curious, and so am I. But the inner man first, or possibly at one and the same time. Now you, I think, know a lot more than do I. Suppose you relate what has transpired. You say you brought one calling herself Miss Sewell here from Wolfboro."

"Yes," Bob agreed eagerly, only too anxious for the question to be broached. "I brought her——" And then he paused suddenly and eyed his companion sharply, —"one calling herself Miss Sewell——" He used Marsden's own words. "What do you mean by that?"

For a moment Marsden stared steadily at the other without answering and then, very slowly:

"I feel as if I could speak plainly to you, Mr. Hernald. As I said, I feel that I know you—and yet—

well,"—the broad shoulders were shrugged apologetically,—" it's not really my affair, so I hesitate. But go on, please. Tell me what you know, and then I'll return frankness with frankness."

" Well, I must admit I don't understand the thing at all," Bob declared, now thoroughly perplexed by the other's manner. " But I've nothing to conceal. Frankness is not only demanded of me, considering my connection with this affair, but gladly given."

" Oh, I used the word advisedly, Mr. Hernald," Marsden replied, with a laugh. " Go ahead! You see, I never knew Kendon was in this country until I met him on the road. It rather startled me."

" I should think it might," Bob agreed, and then with a brief touch he told of his meeting with Meryl Sewell, of her coming with him, of the second car on the road and then of how he and Frank Hemming had found Kendon.

Through it all Marsden sat leaning back in his huge arm-chair, an interested listener. Two deep furrows were between his eyes and the brows were drawn down so that he looked out from under them in a strained stare. The look was sharp, for the eyes were bright and penetrating, but no expression appeared in them or on the face, and not a muscle moved, nor was there any sign on the lawyer's part of either surprise or disbelief in the story. The long white fingers slowly smoothed the closely cropped gray moustache or touched the thin, white hair, and that was all.

"I see," he nodded as Bob paused. "Have you any doubt that the lady was Miss Sewell?"

"Have I any doubt! Why—but I fail to understand. Isn't she Miss Sewell?"

"Of course! Of course!" Marsden agreed with a wave of his hand. "I was repeating my thoughts—of course you know nothing. She told you her name was Meryl Sewell, that is all you know," and he nodded slowly.

For a moment Bob considered. He seemed again to meet a strange reticence, as in the case of Kendon. Possibly he had by chance stumbled upon a family skeleton that no one desired to unearth. If that was the case—but no. He had started from Wolfboro with Meryl Sewell, or someone by that name. Someone who he suddenly realised was becoming of considerable interest to him. He was responsible for her to a certain extent, for she had last been in his care and now—where was she? What had happened her? That he would find out, to the end of setting right what he had done. Harm should not come to her through an act of his, family skeletons or no.

Marsden was the first to break the silence. He turned suddenly to the table and ran through a pile of photographs. Selecting one, he handed it across the table.

"Did the lady look like that?"

"Is it—no, it's not she—but yes, exactly, only younger."

"I see. Then a point can be considered settled," Marsden agreed, taking the photograph and slipping it carefully into his pocket, instead of replacing it on the table. "You see, Mr. Hernald, I have the failing of most lawyers—after the flaws in the case. But now I think some light is due you. To begin with, I personally doubted it was Meryl Sewell whom you met."

"But she said that was her name. What photograph is that? Her mother? Certainly there is a family resemblance somewhere between the girl I saw and that photograph, and, too, why, if you saw her——"

"How old was she?" Marsden broke in.

"Oh, as to age, twenty; no, twenty-three."

"Yes—er—I think you are right. There can be no doubt."

"Why should you think there is?"

"Because Meryl Sewell, Joseph Sewell's daughter, died when a baby."

"Died!" Bob repeated. "Then who——"

"Is this girl you find stranded in Wolfboro?" Marsden shook his head. "You see, I am as puzzled as are you."

"But——" And then Bob suddenly recalled the old servant, who in the excitement of the conversation he had forgotten. "Kendon! He can perhaps explain; in fact, he must know."

"Perhaps Kendon can explain," the lawyer agreed, "*if* he will."

For a moment Bob searched the seemingly expressionless face before him for a meaning to the words.

"Again, I don't understand," he answered. "Don't you think we are at odds in this discussion? You see, Mr. Marsden, whoever the girl may be, I feel, to a certain extent, responsible for her. I induced her to leave Wolfboro in my car. I brought her as far as the hill below here and then allowed her to pass into the hands of men of whom I presume you knew nothing."

"What!" Marsden demanded sharply. "Oh, no,"—his lips parted again in an easy smile—"no, hardly. I know nothing of Mr. Sewell's secretary, as he named himself."

"Of course not. Well, these men must be somewhere. I allowed this girl to go with them. I propose to find her."

For a moment the lawyer sat silently stroking his moustache, a favourite trick of his. Then he rose quickly to his feet.

"So do I, Mr. Hernald. I propose to find out who this Meryl Sewell can be and where she is. You certainly can be of great assistance, and I'm glad to hear you say you are ready to join in the search. You see, I'm tied up here. Mr. Sewell is ill—dangerously so; he demands my almost constant attendance, and this work, if done at all, must be done quietly and secretly."

"Or publicly," Bob suggested. "A motor car with three men and a girl in it can't go running around the

country, even up here, without being seen. Publish a description broadcast, and we'll find them at once."

Marsden shook his head. "A quiet search is the only way. You'll see it yourself when I give you more facts. Can you wait? Good! I must run up to Mr. Sewell's room, and, too, I'll look up Kendon. I want to ask him a few questions and then I'll give you some inside history that will clear the puzzle a good bit. When you understand all, we can arrange a plan. Make yourself at home. There are some good books on those shelves. I may be gone a half hour, at least," and with a nod and smile the lawyer slipped from the room.

But to turn to books was impossible. Events that day had run too fast, and his interest in the plight of Meryl Sewell, for he so considered her, was too deep.

He could picture the girl even more clearly than before he had learned of her plight. The bronze hair over the temples, half covering the ears, framed a face each line clearly pictured to him now. But the eyes, large, dark ones, that looked out so innocently, so trustingly, as if the world and all was a strange place, expected to be undoubtedly kind to one so innocent of its ways. They seemed to be before him, looking down, asking help.

She had trusted in him and he had brought her to what?

His blood leaped at the thought of what might befall her. Why did Marsden go so slow? Time was pre-

cious. Why, it was now three days, three days—she might be dead.

And so, with these thoughts, he paced up and down the long library, as was his habit when perplexed or excited.

For ten minutes he tramped, and then calming down a bit he began to turn over the magazines and books on the table. None interested him, and half impatiently he turned. As he did so a magazine was brushed to the floor.

Stooping quickly to pick it up, his finger touched something soft. The next instant he straightened and in his hand lay a tiny glove. A brown glove—tiny, rumpled, pathetic as it hung limp. And the palm was ripped. A little tear, but in the right glove.

Slowly he looked about the room in blank question. Meryl Sewell had worn brown gloves and the right one had been ripped—a little rip in the palm, that he had noticed as she sat beside him during their ride from Wolfboro.

CHAPTER VI

A STRANGE CALLER

For an instant Bob stood staring at the little glove in his hand, and then at a sound from the doorway thrust it quickly into his pocket.

He felt as if he was moving in a maze of never-ending tangles. Light, seemingly so, rushed in one moment, and then came some new turn that threw the whole business out of gear again.

Marsden had declared Meryl Sewell had not reached Wilderness Lodge, and yet here was one of her gloves in his pocket. She must, therefore, have been in the very room itself, for how else could the glove have been dropped where he had found it? Too, Marsden had hinted at Kendon's being able to clear up a good many facts, *if* he would talk. In that mere suggestion had, of course, been the hidden meaning that he would not, in the lawyer's opinion.

But Kendon had shown real anxiety for Meryl Sewell's safety—Meryl Sewell! Marsden as good as said she was not Meryl Sewell, and in the next breath agreed she could be no one else.

It was a strange jumble, and Bob Hernald in perplexity watched the stooping figure of Kendon as he came toward him.

"Has Mr. Marsden explained matters at all, sir?"

Kendon suddenly demanded, coming to a stop before Bob. He looked up quickly from under his shaggy eyebrows—thin, spare brows, like a poor brush that had lost most of its bristles. In his voice there was a note of equality, and the "sir" was seemingly added as an afterthought.

"Hardly," Bob answered, with a laugh. A sudden dislike for the short, squatty servant came over him. Whatever was the underlying secret in the whole affair, an innocent girl was the sufferer, and because of this man before him. If he hadn't left her stranded in Wolfboro, the whole business would have had no beginning. Too, why this dogged silence and sphynx-like manner? And more, why this sharp question, with its underlying note of intimation that Mr. Marsden could explain matters, when the servant himself, beyond all question, could give more information than anyone else.

Kendon eyed the other stolidly, but recovered himself sufficiently to hand across a match tray as Bob drew a cigarette from his case.

"Hardly," Bob repeated, as he settled himself on the arm of a huge chair. "But hasn't he seen you? Mr. Marsden left here a good ten minutes ago with the purpose of looking you up."

"I have not seen him."

"Well, he was going to see Mr. Sewell first. But you—you don't seem to be very much disturbed over this thing, yet when we pulled you out of that old bunk house you were keen to rush back to Wolfboro. Now

you seem to accept Miss Sewell's disappearance as a matter of course."

"Yes," Kendon nodded, "it has happened. She is gone!"

"True," Bob agreed, a tinge of sarcasm in his voice, "and no one seems to think much of it. Even Mr. Marsden advocates caution in the search for her."

"And don't you agree with him?" Kendon demanded.

"No, I don't; but then, what of it?" he put in, suddenly remembering that he was discussing with a servant Mr. Marsden's acts. "He knows best, I suppose."

"Yes," Kendon agreed, "and Mr. Sewell is too ill to do anything."

"Have you seen him."

"Yes."

"And told him of what has befallen his niece?"

"Yes."

"Well, what does he say—how does he take it? It must be a terrible blow to him."

"Yes." Again came the monosyllabic reply.

For a moment Bob considered the one before him in absolute perplexity. He was tempted to vent his opinion in no mistakable language, for Kendon's attitude was one of hostility, if not verging upon rudeness.

But instead, he checked himself, and rising crossed the room slowly.

With a turn he came back and paused halfway to Kendon.

"Mr. Marsden will be back directly—at least, he said so, then perhaps, as he will have had a talk with Mr. Sewell, we can arrange for some set programme."

"I see," Kendon agreed, letting the words come out slowly, and with that he turned, and walking to the far end of the room stood gazing silently out of the long porch window.

Bob watched him go, and for a moment stood contemplating the square back. Then with a toss of the head and a smile, he threw himself into one of the arm-chairs, and settling down comfortably gave himself up to a contemplation of the whole affair and his cigarette.

It seemed, as the clock ticked away, the only sound in the room, that somewhere under the puzzling surface of what had actually happened there must be a clear explanation and a very, very simple one.

So far, none had seemed anxious to talk, and yet eventually they must,—even the surly Kendon,—and from that talk facts could be put together that would not only throw light on the whole matter, but enable one to easily locate the men who had carried Meryl Sewell away. It was seemingly impossible to him that these men could have known of her being in America and yet not be identified either by Gale Sewell, Kendon or, most certainly, Marsden, a man versed in the unravelling of tangled threads.

Had Kendon a finger in the pie, to the extent of being responsible for Meryl Sewell's disappearance? Hardly, in view of his own abduction—and then, as Bob's hand

sought his cigarette case, his fingers touched the rumpled glove.

Rising to his feet he started to cross to Kendon, resolved, as Marsden did not return, to show the glove to the old servant and to find, at least, if he recognised it as Meryl Sewell's, and if so, what explanation he could make of it being in that very room.

The heavy rug deadened his footsteps, and he was close to the servant when the latter turned suddenly. For an instant they eyed each other, then the sound that had caused Kendon to wheel fell on their ears again. It came from the far end of the library. Both stood silent, listening.

They were in shadow by the window and so were the bookcases at the other end. Yet, as they watched, one section of the shelves—they were built about the wall a solid row—moved ever so slightly.

Bob cast one glance at the still expressionless face of the old servant and then stepped back beside him.

The bookcase swung out as if hinged. They could hardly see it move, except that the light bindings gradually turned from them and the dark back of the case met their gaze.

A black spot appeared where the shelves had stood, and then out of it stepped a man. He was dressed in a dark suit, and over his eyes a light slouch hat was drawn low.

A slight breeze came from the opening and rustled the

book leaves on the table. On it was borne the odour of burning tin, such as comes from a dark lantern. Again Bob glanced at Kendon, feeling that he was the one, knowing the house and being the trusted servant of its owner, to make any move that was to be made.

But Kendon stood quiet, no expression on his face, seemingly accepting a moving bookcase as a common occurrence.

The man glanced quickly about the room, as if to make sure he was alone, and then advanced with certainty across the soft rug.

Straight to the table he made his way, and quickly began to look it over.

The books and magazines he brushed aside hurriedly, and then with more care he repeated his search. Finally he stopped and glancing about, dropped to his knees to feel along the rug.

Again Bob stole a glance at Kendon, but the old servant was seemingly as immovable as a statue.

A sound at the door drew the eyes of the two watchers in that direction, as Marsden threw it open and stepped across the threshold.

Down went a book with a crash from the table, and the three turned at the sound as the lawyer was about to speak.

Out of the bright light of the lamp on the table flitted the shadow of a man. Into the shadows at the far end of the room he passed, and then, with the slightest sound in the world, the bookcase moved back slowly into

place, showing an even row of white volumes, while the three turned and stared at one another.

Kendon's face was as immovable as ever, but on Marsden's a flush of anger showed for an instant, and then an easy laugh hung on his lips.

"One of our strange doors, Mr. Hernald," he laughed. "The old place is full of them, is it not, Kendon?"

"There are a few, sir," the servant agreed.

No question as to the man, who he was or what might be his errand.

CHAPTER VII

SKELETONS

"COME!" Marsden spoke quickly, "let's get at this thing; sit down, Mr. Hernald, and, Kendon, you must join us, take that chair."

But Kendon stood irresolute, hesitating as between following the suggestion—nearer a command—or his natural inclination to leave the room at once.

The moving bookcase was no novelty to him, and yet to have it opened by one he had never seen before was perplexing, even if his studied stoicism failed to indicate that fact to Bob Hernald. His master knew how to work that bookcase and so did he. Possibly Mr. Marsden was acquainted with its intricacy, though Gale Sewell had taken such keen delight in his few little "trick" passages and doors that he had not even divulged them all to his closest friend and only companion since he had built Wilderness Lodge.

It was, therefore, with interest that the old servant watched the man enter the room and he planned to stop him only when he had divulged his purpose.

Then the lawyer had appeared suddenly, and before Kendon, slow of foot under any circumstances, could move, the intruder was gone.

Yet even now, if he could get away, he might catch

him as he emerged from the house. There was only one exit from the passage, unless one followed an inside staircase which led directly to Mr. Sewell's bedroom.

So Kendon moved to the door, instead of toward the chair indicated by the lawyer.

"I must go back to Mr. Sewell, sir."

"Go back to Mr. Sewell!" Marsden repeated. "But, Kendon, this matter of Miss Sewell. It must be taken up at once. Mr. Sewell has but spoken of it to me, though too weak, really, to go into it at any length," the lawyer added, turning to Bob. "We, however, can take it up. You must give me all the information you have. I must know of your trip, and——"

"I will, sir," Kendon broke in, his tone servile, apologetic, "in a moment." And before further objections could be raised to his going he had fled.

Marsden watched the door close, a flush high on his cheeks. As the latch clicked, he shot a glance down the room to where the bookcase had moved so strangely, and then faced his companion, the flush fading, a smile on his lips again.

"It doesn't seem possible," he remarked, almost as if speaking to himself.

"No, it doesn't," Bob agreed, jumping at the lawyer's meaning and catching it too, "but you should have seen him just before you came in, or rather, just after you left. His manner was as if I was responsible for Miss Sewell's disappearance."

"You mean——! What can the fellow be thinking of? But you see," Marsden hurried on, "he's a privileged character. Mr. Sewell has made a great deal of him, and he has, at times, the way of taking liberties."

"Yet why such an attitude?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"Possibly you know too much—he may resent your presence here."

"A guilty conscience?"

"Er—no—no." There was a slow shaking of the head. "No, I would hardly say that. You see, Kendon has always been a trusted servant, yet in this matter—well, as a lawyer, as Mr. Sewell's legal representative, outside of all personal feelings, I am bound to look with suspicion on everyone. One can't do much else. You're a lawyer, yourself, Mr. Hernald, and must admit I am compelled to examine all parties concerned, with suspicion, giving them, of course, the advantage of the doubt."

"Most certainly!" Bob agreed with emphasis, for the lawyer seemed more than anxious to excuse even the slightest feeling of suspicion he had allowed himself to express toward Kendon. "You can do no less, I included."

"Oh, no!" The lawyer's laugh was hearty now. "You simply saw an attractive girl in distress, and going your way. Your act was that which any man would have performed."

"But I should never have turned her over to those fellows on the road. I didn't know them."

"That occurs to you now—it didn't at the time, or you wouldn't have done so. Why should you have thought for an instant a man meeting you, as he did, claiming to be Gale Sewell's secretary, was anyone else?"

"Oh, I can justify my act," Bob agreed, biting his lips in perplexity, "but that doesn't alter the fact that I committed an error, and by my act this girl is the sufferer."

"And, therefore, you are anxious, naturally, to counteract it."

"I am. I shall not rest until she's found."

"Then I've a proposition to make you. I am Mr. Sewell's friend, as you know—that's the personal side which we put away for an instant. From a business standpoint I am Mr. Sewell's legal adviser, having charge of all his affairs. Now, in this matter, my hands, or rather my personal services, are limited by the demands my friend will make upon me. Someone else must take up the search. Detectives can be had, but they are often bunglers, and besides, Mr. Sewell, particularly in his present nervous condition of health, objects to any outsider coming in. I know you,—not so well personally, but through Jack,—and, besides, you are a lawyer, an added advantage. Therefore, I wish to suggest that you accept a retainer in this matter. You may have to give up some time—in fact,

while we may clear this thing up quickly—it may take weeks."

For a moment Bob considered the suggestion, which came rather unexpectedly.

"Is there any need of a retainer? It seems hardly as though that formality should be gone through with. I look upon the affair from a personal standpoint, Mr. Marsden——"

"Yes! Yes! I agree," the other broke in, "but why discuss it? If it were between you and me, we could arrange the thing quickly, but Sewell is to be considered. He is a very methodical man, Mr. Hernald. In business matters he is as red-taped as the worst of us. I must be able to tell him that you have accepted a retainer. Oh, a nominal one, if you like. That is left to you. Otherwise he will not rest easy."

"Agreed to, then," Bob nodded, "if it is put in that light."

"Good! Now we can go on."

Then he saw more clearly the lawyer's point, or at least, thought he did. If family skeletons were to be unearthed, he would learn of them as attorney for Mr. Sewell. Perhaps in no other light did the strange owner of Wilderness Lodge desire that they should be divulged to an outsider.

"To go back," Marsden was saying, "as is necessary, there were two brothers—Gale Sewell and Joseph Sewell. I went to college with them, knew them both personally, and so can speak of their affairs which lead

up to this matter in hand. Joseph Sewell married; Gale Sewell never did. Perhaps if Joseph Sewell had not, Gale Sewell would have."

"You mean Joseph Sewell's wife was as well his brother's choice?"

"Yes. But he bore it bravely. It was a blow to him —a hard blow—I know, for even then I was in constant touch with him, while with Joseph Sewell I was hardly as intimate; in fact, Joseph Sewell and I had had at that time a trifling difference of opinion that forced us apart.

"When Joseph Sewell's engagement was announced, his brother left New York at once. His affairs he placed in my hands, and for five years I never heard from or saw him, except as a draft would be presented, calling for money. From these drafts it was evident he was travelling extensively. As is natural with a sportsman, he followed the line of big game, and Asia, Africa, and the far East were visited.

"In the meantime, a little over two years from the date of Joseph Sewell's marriage, his wife died giving birth to a daughter. Indirectly I learned that the shock so prostrated him that he never really recovered from it. In fact, though I did not see him—I tried to—I believe he went partially insane. But however that may be, he left almost instantly after his wife's death for England, leaving the baby in care of a maid whom his wife had brought with her from Ireland, and who was a distant cousin of Kendon's. Kendon, you

understand, was in Joseph Sewell's employ, coming to him at the time of their marriage, at Mrs. Sewell's suggestion.

"Gale Sewell returned about three years after the death of his sister-in-law, and learning the facts, began a systematic search for his brother and the child. It seemed a fruitless undertaking, for child, nurse, and brother had disappeared as if the earth had opened and swallowed them. But at last Kendon appeared. His master was dead and he had been sent back by him, on his deathbed, to Gale Sewell with a message from his brother. What it was I do not know, for that is one thing Gale Sewell has never divulged to anyone. It resulted, however, in Kendon serving the brother of his dead master, and under his instructions returning to Ireland in search of the child and its nurse who, you will bear in mind, was a distant cousin of his. I went with Kendon, and though we spent a year at the task, we never accomplished anything, except to find a meagre record that seemed to point to the death of the child when a baby.

"On our return, we found Gale Sewell waiting, with little patience, for he had determined upon having his niece, the daughter of the woman he had loved, for his own to care for."

"But Kendon!" Bob broke in. "Couldn't he help you? Didn't he know what had been done?"

"He only knew that Joseph Sewell had refused even to see the baby. The night the child was born the

mother died. The father sent for his wife's maid, Mary Farland was her name, and gave her some instructions. The next morning she left the house with the baby, and Kendon claimed never to have heard of her or seen her since. However, we failed; the child could not be found, nor was the record of her death at all authentic, and so Gale Sewell, broken-hearted—aged with his disappointment and years of hard travel—went away again, taking Kendon with him.

"At last he came back, ill and still more broken, so much so that I hardly knew him, and within ten months of his return purchased this land and came here. To be near him, I gave up my practice and, buying land beyond here, settled down to a mere hermit's life. So we lived until two months ago, when Kendon received one day a letter stating that the child—whom he and I could not find, though we hunted and advertised in all manner of ways—was alive."

"From whom was the letter?"

"From a half-brother of Kendon's. This half-brother helped us in our search when we were in Ireland, and knew of our endeavours. He wrote that he had found Mary Farland and knew where the child was.

"Gale Sewell was for starting at once, but a heavy cold contracted on a fishing trip a week before had developed into a racking cough, and I persuaded him to send Kendon. I should have gone myself, but to be frank, Mr. Hernald, I have feared to leave Mr. Sewell for any length of time the last year—his health is so broken.

There is an old wound, too, which he received in India in a mix-up with a lot of tribesmen, that gets red at times," Marsden motioned a line across his high forehead, "and it's best for someone to be with him."

"So Kendon went alone?"

"Kendon went off post haste. He cabled when he landed at Queenstown, and from then until I met him on the road with you we heard nothing of him."

"What!" Bob exclaimed, startled at the sudden end of the tale, and its decidedly meagre details as far as helping them out of their present tangle. "You heard nothing of him from the time he landed?"

"And know nothing more. He tells Sewell—so I learned from my friend but now—that he found his half-brother, and through him the old nurse. That Meryl Sewell was in a convent——"

"So she told me."

"And that he got her out of there and started straight for home. He says he wired of his success, when he sailed, and on his arrival in New York sent a message asking that a carriage meet them at Wolfboro."

"And none of the messages ever reached you?"

"Not one."

"It seems positively unexplainable."

"It is. Now to question Kendon is a hard matter, but I shall get at him in time."

"In time! But Miss Sewell?"

"Can best be traced by getting all facts from Kendon."

"Then you go on the theory that he knows the truth?"

"He must. These men knew he was in America with Meryl Sewell,—admitting for an instant the girl is Meryl Sewell,—and as no one else but Kendon, Mr. Sewell, and myself knew that he had even gone for her, there must be some connection."

"But why should anyone carry them both off?"

For a long minute Marsden considered the question, and then slowly uncrossing his knees, leaned forward.

"One can only toss theories on to the table in such a matter, Mr. Hernald,—out they come and the best must be accepted. That I have done,"—a long pause,—"and it looks as if it *might* be this: There is no Meryl Sewell, this person whom you know is a substitute—an impostor. Kendon knew that Gale Sewell would make his niece, if he had one living, the heir to all his property. He gets a substitute for the part. His confederates in Ireland come to this country to see fair play to themselves, and, we will say, decide Kendon is not going to be square. To demand their rights, or perhaps better terms, they carry off the girl."

"That doesn't seem plausible, and yet even considering it, why should they carry Kendon off as well?"

"To make terms, to force something out of him he hadn't given."

Bob nodded reluctantly, yet he could but recall Ken-

don's experience in the bunk house, and his half-hesitating reference to the men demanding information of him.

"But even then," he protested, "why should Kendon come here? After he got free, why didn't he go and make his terms with them?"

"In the first place," Marsden answered, with a smile, "he was with them when you pulled him out, so why go back. In the second place, he may not have planned to come here at all—remember I came upon you quite unexpectedly, and literally fetched him along; you too. And again, until I met you, Kendon believed the girl was here."

"But it doesn't seem plausible—it can't go down, some way," Bob protested.

"Thinking of the girl?" Marsden asked with an easy smile. "Well, a good actress would be needed, and Kendon knows that."

"On the station platform at Wolfboro, he was the servant."

"A carriage was to be waiting for them," Marsden suggested.

"But you say he did not send such a message?"

"I said we didn't get it. Lord, man! If anyone wanted to, they could stand out there in the road and stop a dozen messages. That part is easy."

"Don't they 'phone them generally? They do to the Club."

"Yes, they do. Oh, you can pick ten thousand flaws

in my theory,—so can I,—yet what else can we see?"

"You should know."

"I know this, that when Joseph Sewell left America with Kendon he took in portable form all his fortune. When he died, there was nothing left, and he wasn't an extravagant man."

"But if, as you think, this girl is an impostor, why look for her?"

"To find out—to knock this damnable scheme in the head," Marsden thundered, showing real anger for the first time. "And too, to be sure. Suppose she is the child? Suppose I am wronging Kendon? I want to be sure, for if by chance she is my old friend's niece, he must have her for the rest of his days. The mother was his life. When he lost her he nearly died of a broken heart; so now, if his niece is alive and can be given to him to make up one drop of what he has suffered, heaven and earth must be turned to that end."

"But, man!" Bob demanded, leaning forward suddenly, "that picture. Is that Mrs. Sewell?"

"Yes," Marsden nodded. "Yes."

"The child then must be Meryl Sewell. The likeness is too strong for there to be the slightest question."

The eyes of the lawyer rested on Bob Hernald's face one instant. Then he spoke slowly, as if he would have kept the words back even from himself.

"When in Ireland looking for the child, I learned, by the merest accident, of a woman who, I am convinced,

was Mrs. Sewell's illegitimate sister, and too, that Joseph Sewell knew her quite well before he did the woman he married."

"I see!" Bob nodded. "Then she might have had a child and——"

"Kendon learned of it, Kendon and his half-brother. They might have arranged it all, counting on the resemblance of the children."

"Yes," Bob nodded again. "I see!"

CHAPTER VIII

GALE SEWELL

ALL the next day Bob Hernald's automobile ate up mile upon mile of New Hampshire's roads. He knew that the car into which Meryl Sewell had passed had not followed him back down the hill, and so must have gone up the hill to the cross-roads where Mr. Marsden had been met, and then—to the right, left or straight ahead down past Wilderness Lodge.

Past Wilderness Lodge was his first conclusion, and for some strange reason a stop there. How else explain the glove he had found?

But on that point Mr. Marsden was more than positive the evidence was at fault, for he had spent that Monday evening in the library himself, so certainly Meryl Sewell could not, at that time, have dropped it there.

No other explanation could be put forth either by the lawyer or Bob Hernald, and so for the time being the glove and the strange caller, who had undoubtedly come looking for it, were put aside while the search went on.

Hour upon hour Bob Hernald travelled over the dusty roads and in the broiling hot sun. Yet for miles along the right road his search was without result. Each farmhouse passed, each village—there were not many

—had the same answer. No one had seen a car as described.

It was a sad jumble, but the saddest part to Bob Hernald was the thought that such a girl should be so placed.

Her own statements to him showed she knew but little of her past life, and so, possibly, if she was not the daughter of Joseph Sewell's wedlock, she believed herself to be.

There was some meagre consolation in such a thought —yet meagre indeed when he came to dissect it, for to him the girl of the hotel, of the few brief hours at his side in their run from Wolfboro, was a tiny floating speck upon a strange sea—one that looked out through big innocent eyes upon a world that should be kind, that should not play the mad trick of making her the cat's-paw of scheming men. That was bad enough—far worse was the thought of her a party to the trick.

It was late when he finally turned in at the gates to Wilderness Lodge and ran up under the huge oaks toward the house itself. A full moon played mad pranks with the tree trunks and their heavy boughs, and over the perfect road a lacework of fairy pattern was woven, a swaying, moving, dancing net that seemed like the shifting flashes on restless waters.

He ran the car round to the side of the house and under a huge covered porch, and then slowly retraced his steps to the front door.

As his hand was raised toward the bell the door itself

flew open in his face, and Kendon stood on the threshold. He had not seen the old servant since he left the library the night before, and he was startled by his strange appearance.

"You!" Kendon cried as he flung the door wide; "you!"

"Yes; but what's wrong?" Bob demanded as he caught a good glimpse of the servant's face. The bloodshot eyes, the tumbled hair, added a wildness of look and manner that was startling.

"You!" Kendon cried again. "You against him too? You!"

"Against whom?" Bob demanded, still holding his place, a step below Kendon in the doorway. "What's wrong, man? Come," he motioned toward the hall, "step aside. I want to see Mr. Marsden, and if anything's wrong let us help you."

"Help!" And the laugh was high pitched and mad that came with the words. "Help! You! Ha—yes, a fine helper. But you've done it!" The voice suddenly swung low as the man stepped through the doorway and close to Bob. "You've done it! He's gone, too!"

"He! Who? Mr. Marsden?"

"Marsden!" And again the almost shrieking laugh.

"No. He! Mr. Sewell. You've got him too."

"Kendon, what's wrong—what are you talking about?" Bob demanded. "Where is Mr. Marsden?"

"Gone, I tell you. Gone!" And the voice again rumbled low.

"Gone! Where?"

"To carry him off, I suppose." And Kendon turned as if to move away.

Bob seized him by the shoulder and swung him about.

"Answer me! Who's gone?"

"Mr. Sewell, I told you! Out of his bed! Out of his bed!" And with a wrench Kendon broke loose from the restraining hand and fled down the steps and out into the night.

For an instant Bob Hernald stood irresolute, and then with a bound he rushed into the hall and toward the library, the only room in the huge house that he knew.

Turning on the lights, he gazed upon empty chairs and a stillness that seemed ominous in its very self.

Finding a bell by the door he pressed it, and far away came the sound of its ringing. But no answer came to the summons, and though he rang and rang, the silence went unbroken save for the faint jingle far away, like the distant sound of tinkling sprites.

At last, moving almost stealthily himself, as if afraid to wake the awful silence with his own footsteps, he passed down the hall toward the front door, uncertain what to do, yet half resolved to hurry to the Marsdens' for help.

Yet in the very stillness of the house hung a fascination, and he lingered in the hall, dark in the shadows under the overhanging balcony, for some answer to the bell he had rung.

His eyes sought the dark corners and the upper floor, off of which gray doors opened, as if he expected momentarily someone would appear.

The stillness grew deeper, more solemn, more mysterious. Where were the servants Mr. Marsden had installed? Where was the doctor? Perhaps somewhere within the walls; but should he search?

Slowly, undecided still, he moved toward the front door, when suddenly a sound outside caught his ear.

He wheeled like a flash, and there to his right, in the middle of the gravel drive, stood a figure which for an instant he mistook for the old servant.

Then, as his eyes grew accustomed to the moonlight, he saw the man was taller,—he wondered how he had mistaken him at all for Kendon,—well over six feet. Like a frail ghost he seemed. His feet were encased in slippers, a pair of light trousers covered his long legs, and they flapped mournfully in the faint breeze that played among the trees and sent the branches waving to the tossing of shifting shadows and patches of light over the man, until he looked like a mass of light and dark blots. The long arms hung languidly, and it was light enough to note the frail arms and welling veins, a strange tracery of dark purple. The head turned away from the house was thrust forward and the neck seemed stretched an undue length by the act, yet in reality the bent shoulders added to that effect. Heavy locks of white hair covered the huge head.

The man stood still, as if undecided, and then when

finally with a slow, weary motion he turned to look at the house, Bob Hernald recognised the owner of Wilderness Lodge.

Stepping quickly across the porch, he moved down the steps while Gale Sewell watched him with a strained stare.

The loose, white shirt, open at the neck, was without a collar, and the bare feet, thrust into low slippers, gave the man a disorderly appearance added to by the dishevelled hair and white skin.

To the other's greeting he made no answer, but at his "I doubt if you remember me. Hernald is my name. I just got back and was looking for Mr. Marsden," he nodded quickly, an odd nod of the long, lank neck and head, while a faint smile, half wistful, played across his face.

"Come!" he said. "Come!"

With that he turned and led off down the drive, as if he had only been waiting for the other. Twenty yards from the house he suddenly turned in among the trees, and following a path that led towards the north he quickened his steps.

Bob followed, undecided. He hesitated to speak, and yet, why was Gale Sewell about, when he had been reported so ill and in bed? True, Kendon had told him his master had got away, but Kendon had seemed as near bereft of reason as man could be, and he naturally hesitated to place too much reliance in the servant's wild words. Surely the figure before him walked with

no uncertain step. Was it possible Gale Sewell had not been ill at all?

The long day in the sun, perhaps, had made Bob overtired, for he found himself going over all the statements, that had been made him; all the acts of Kendon and Mr. Marsden, and questioned each one in turn. Why was it he could accept nothing that had transpired, or been said, as the truth? What thrust the doubt upon everything?

They tramped on for ten minutes in silence, the tall, lank, loose-jointed man ahead, Bob Hernald following like a dog at heel.

At a hollow space among the trees, a space circled by low seats, the owner of Wilderness Lodge paused and turned for the first time toward his companion.

"You!" he said, pointing straight with a long, lank finger, "you saw her?"

"Yes," Bob agreed, wondering at his companion's way of putting the fact and the need of their coming to such a spot to talk. "Yes, I saw your niece."

"And what was she like?" The long thin face with the heavy white eyebrows, thick and matted, protruding over the eyes in high ridges, was thrust close to the other's face. "What was she like? Like this?" And with a quick movement the shrunken breast was uncovered, disclosing an old miniature hanging from a tiny gold chain.

"Yes," Bob agreed, looking closely in the pale light

upon a dainty ivory the counterpart of the photograph Mr. Marsden had shown him.

"Ah! Then there is no question. Kendon knows! Kendon knows!" The voice rose high pitched. "He said it was no use. He said so! He said so! Do you hear me?" The face grew red, the eyes flashed while the clenched fist pounded the shrunken chest till the tiny portrait danced on the bare flesh. "But it's true! She is alive! And you—saw—her." The voice dropped from a shrill note to a thundering bass, and again the faces of the two came together as Gale Sewell thrust out his long neck.

Bob gave back a slight inch and stood staring straight into eyes wild and angry. And then, the long red line across the forehead—as Mr. Marsden had traced it for him—caught his eye, and like a flash the truth came to him; the owner of Wilderness Lodge was out of his head. His illness and the shock of learning that his niece was lost had proved too much for the weakened frame—the man was in delirium.

"Yes, I know, Mr. Sewell," Bob agreed, forcing a smile to his lips; "I saw her, and I can tell you all about her, if you wish."

"You?" came the voice, weakening suddenly.

"Yes," Bob nodded. "Let us walk slowly through the cool wood. I will tell you of your niece as we go." He held out a hand to take the thin arm.

At the touch, his companion leaped back with a cry, beating the air before him with his long arms.

"Ah! Ah!" he shrieked. "You would? Not you! Not you! I know where she is. I can see her." The voice paused as the owner gasped weakly for breath. "Yes, I can see her," he added, with a crafty grin. "See her? I know where she is."

"Of course," Bob nodded, holding his ground, not daring to advance for fear of alarming the man again. "Suppose we talk of her now, and in the morning call upon her. It's getting pretty late."

"Late!" came the scornful answer; "late! See how bright it is. To-night! To-night! Now, on such a night! Now!"

"If you think best," Bob agreed, trying first of all to quiet the man. "Shall we go on? Which way is it?"

"Up yonder—over the hills," the arms were waved vaguely about. "She is waiting! Waiting! Aye, waiting! As she waits up there. My Meryl!" The lank fingers clutched the miniature passionately. "Waiting there for me—as she was that night at the old tryst. The pretty face, the dark eyes, and the glorious hair! The lips trembling to ask a question for fear of hurting; trembling to say a word for fear of doing one wrong. Waiting, my Meryl!" The voice dropped suddenly and the wild harangue ended full of pathos: "And she, the little one, is waiting too. Do you hear me?" High pitched again came the demand: "Do you hear? *I go to her!*"

With a cry, his arms beating the air, he fled through the dark shadows of the trees like a flitting white ghost.

CHAPTER IX

THE GNARLED OAK

With a bound Bob Hernald followed, and on the two raced through the woods. The tall, lank form of Gale Sewell, fantastic in its loose garb, covered the ground in long strides. Then in among the trees the owner of Wilderness Lodge dodged, and for a long time it was killing work, not simply to keep pace, but to follow the quick moving form at all.

Bushes screened the way, briars tore and caught, low branches struck the face before a protecting hand could be thrown up to guard against them, and yet all seemed no obstacle to the one racing on in the lead.

Twice Bob lost the flitting figure and then, catching as afar a fluttering glimpse of the ghostly form in a shaft of moonlight, quickened his pace again. Each was silent, and well they might be, for the work cut out was hard and tiring.

Rocks came in the way, but over them the long-legged man made fast time, springing from one to another with leaps and bounds prodigious in their length. It was heart-breaking work to the pursuer, at best, for when he did overtake the other he would simply have one wild with delirium on his hands, spent in wind, tired out with the great exertion he was making, and help nowhere near.

At last when the pursuit seemed never-ending, only increasingly heart-breaking with each effort, it ceased abruptly, for at a protruding root—such traps, up to then had been cleared easily—Gale Sewell went down, hands out before him, with no sound, a limp, spent heap.

Bob came up panting, and leaned against a huge tree to breathe. He was too spent even to move.

"You fool!" he muttered, passing his tongue over his parched lips. "You fool!"

He looked at his hands, cut and torn, and touched his cheek where a sharp bough had ripped away the skin. It was wet with blood. His cap was gone, a sleeve of his coat torn half away, and yet he could only survey the wreck half-realisingly as he wiped his brow, his breath coming in deep gasps.

"You fool!" he muttered again, as with an effort he crossed the intervening space and dropping on his knees went to work on the senseless form.

A brook sounded somewhere near, and picking up the lean figure—its weight was so little that he could but look at the lank frame, deceptive in its size, and marvel—he carried it slowly toward a grassy mound.

For a good hour he worked away, forcing water between the lips, bathing the face, dead white, and with chafing and rubbing bringing back to life the feeble pulse.

Once he paused in his work and slipping his revolver from his pocket—he had dropped it there in the morning, in hopes he might meet three men to whom he could

show it—he fired a sharp, barking call for help. The dark, silent woods echoed and re-echoed the sound, and then to the faint rustling branches, the never-wearying brook and the damp odours of the night he bent again to his task.

At last the pulse quickened, the closed eyelids flickered and a deep, long sigh escaped the lips.

"Thank God!" he murmured as he dropped back on his knees, aching in every limb with the chase and back-breaking work. "Thank God!" And then he paused to see if it was the sigh of returning consciousness or the sigh at making the last faint effort to catch consciousness before losing it forever.

But the eyes opened again and seemingly saw; Gale Sewell looked about him. He knew the other, but he seemed not to know where he was or how he came to be in the woods.

"It's all right, Mr. Sewell," Bob assured him, with a forced smile.

"Yes?" came the hardly audible question, and then the tired eyelids closed, the effort of inquiry being too great.

The night was warm, but the ground damp, and so stripping off his own coat, Bob laid it under the other, as some slight protection from the earth.

The man had seemingly fallen into a restful sleep—the breathing regular as a child's, if one could judge by the dilating nostrils, the slow rising and falling of the miniature upon the bare breast.

Where they were in the woods Bob could not say, for their course had been in no direct line. There was no question, however, but that they were somewhere in the deeper forest and on toward higher ground, for the woods were thick and back of the grassy spot across the brook the rocks rose rapidly under the trees.

The brook seemed the best guide, and as he sat listening to its babbling music, one eye upon the still figure, he pondered on what he should do. Follow the brook, to be sure, down the hill with its dancing, babbling waters — to — — —? oh, to rest — — to a quiet — — — to a quiet — — — to a—— And he slept.

It was a slight sound that woke him, and he stirred uncertainly, pulling himself into a sitting position as he tried to make out where he was and, too, to shake the cramps from his aching shoulders.

The woods were hushed and over them hung the early mist of morning. Somewhere behind the hills the sun was striving to break through the clouds and fight its way above the horizon.

But where was he? What could he be doing asleep on the mountain side? Then the noise that had awakened him fell on his ears again, and he looked across the brook to see Gale Sewell step from out the bushes on the farther bank.

"Ah!" Then he remembered, and yet he was only half awake. But as he had fallen asleep thinking of the brook, that was now his first thought, and when the gaunt figure turned and began to slowly move down the

sloping bank, taking the direction of the dancing waters, he rose slowly and stumbled after him.

The man in the lead walked on—he had slipped the other's coat over his shoulders—with bowed head. Slowly he went without looking back. Bob followed, hesitating to speak, content to let his charge take the direction that would be most likely to bring them back to Wilderness Lodge, for it seemed certain the brook must find its way to the lake Gale Sewell had built close to the right terrace of the house.

The mist lifted a little and grew thinner as the ground fell away, and still the two moved on slowly, like flitting ghosts in the quiet about them.

A sleepy bird stirred in the brush; a huge gray squirrel rushed across their path and with whisking tail tore up the trunk of a great oak. The damp, pungent odour of the pines and black moss was in the air and seemed like a deep draught of refreshing nectar.

The pains of a cramped night he shook from aching muscles, and then as the man before him came to a hesitating pause, he moved to his side with a cheery "Good-morning!"

Gale Sewell nodded as he looked Bob over. He exhibited no surprise at their position, but turned and moved ahead again.

For a ways they went in silence, and then the older man began to speak. His voice was nervous, yet low-pitched, and he seemed to feel the quiet of the woods as a soothing tonic.

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"She is waiting!" he ventured softly, and Bob saw he was still thinking of his niece,—or perhaps her mother,—and that in the thought he was still wandering a bit from sanity, yet a quiet vacancy of the mind it was.

"Yes," Bob agreed, "I've no doubt she is."

"Waiting!" Gale Sewell went on, "and I know where."

Bob cast a quick, suspicious glance at his companion. Could it be possible the man did know where his niece could be found? Was it, after all, the truth that had been told him on the righ-road by the one in the automobile? Had Gale Sewell received his servant's message, and fearing something unknown to Kendon, unknown even to his closest friend and legal adviser, had the girl carried off from a danger of which the others had no knowledge?

Perhaps he had learned of Kendon's capture, the one calling himself Gale Sewell's secretary had mentioned a telephonic message from Wolfboro, or perhaps he knew of some good reason for placing his niece where for the present no one should know of her whereabouts.

Suddenly he remembered the glove found by him. Had she come to Wilderness Lodge, and had her uncle, for reasons best known to himself, sent her away, or hidden her somewhere in the rambling pile of rooms?

"Shall we go to her now?" Bob suggested, as if that was their purpose, afoot so early.

"I think we will," the other agreed, "I think we

will." And pausing he looked about him. Then stepping across the huge boulders that stuck their heads above the tumbling waters of the brook, he moved toward a clearing among the trees on the hillside.

Bob Hernald, however, was not prepared to allow his faith in Gale Sewell to go so far as to the changing of their course, and he protested quietly against the direction taken.

"I think it is this way," he urged.

But the gray head was shaken positively, and with long strides Gale Sewell crossed the open space, leaving the other no choice but to follow.

A path opened ahead of them, and the one in the lead took it, the younger man at his side again.

"It seems strange," the old man began suddenly, "a strange thing to have Meryl at last. It will be like old days with another Meryl," he smiled brokenly, "only she will be younger and gay, while I,"—the trembling fingers brushed back the matted white locks,—"am old, weather-beaten. There is a gnarled oak in the park," he went on, stopping to glance about, as if in search of its counterpart at hand, "the winters have crossed it; the winds have torn away its branches while the worms are at work on its heart; but by its side, in the shelter of its still spreading boughs that keep away the driving rain, the cold snow, is a little bush. It flowers and grows. It dances in the light breezes, tempered by the old oak, and lifts its head to the cool shade."

Far away the faint murmur of the brook could be

heard, and the soft moss under their feet deadened the sound of their footsteps.

"Aye, it will be like old, old days, when Meryl and I—— You know," he broke off suddenly from his first thought and turned to his companion, "the old oak takes heart for all the gnawing worms, because of the little flowers at its roots. Yes," he nodded slowly, "the tree was nearly ready to bow to the cold winds until the young flowers sprung up by its side."

There was no answer to make—none was demanded. And the two walked on through the cool woods.

"It makes the oak feel younger," Gale Sewell suddenly resumed. "It makes it feel younger. Its boughs dance as when young; it can almost believe it is young again."

The path turned down into a slight ravine, and as they climbed the other side a clear view over the trees could be had and below a dusty road was to be seen. To their right a thin cloud of gray smoke hung in the air.

"A glass of cold milk would seem pretty good," Bob suggested, appealing to the inner man as possibly the best ground to take. "There's a house down below there. Shall we go on?"

Gale Sewell's eyes swept the tree tops. "Yes," he nodded. "That is where we are going."

Again came the thought that possibly, though the man was beyond question still far from being in his right mind, he was taking a fixed path and for a purpose.

"Why are we going there?" Bob questioned, hoping perhaps to learn what was really in the other's thoughts.

"For a glass of cold milk," came the answer, with a mirthless laugh, "and, too,"—the gray eyes looked out from under the thick, overhanging white eyebrows in perfect saneness,—"to find the young flower."

"Is she there? Is Miss Sewell at the farmhouse?"

The question had a startling effect. For one instant the lean figure hesitated, and then the eyes rolled strangely, a high-pitched mirthless laugh rang from the thin, bloodless lips. Again the long arms beat the air and with a quick turn he broke into a run and fled down the path.

With a rush the other was after him, hoping to check the mad flight before it took such proportions as the race the night before.

At the first bound Bob gained the side of the fleeing man, and then as his toe caught on an uncovered root, he pitched sharply forward on his face.

Out flew his hands to save himself, and one striking the ground too soon, doubled up under his weight with a sharp wrench. In an instant he gained his feet and was off again after the fleeing figure, but his left hand hung limp and through the wrist a knife seemed to have been passed.

The path led ahead with many a twist, and the thick growing bushes shut out all sight of Gale Sewell.

But still Bob ran on, confident the man must be ahead of him somewhere. Up the mountain side the way led,

instead of down, as he had expected. At last, spent with his effort, he paused. Gale Sewell certainly was not ahead of him, and so fearing that he had turned off at some point unnoticed, he retraced his steps.

Hurrying back over the path, he found the bushes broken on one side and following them as a guide, tore his way over rocks and among the young saplings, all the time gradually working down the hill.

At times the trees and bushes were far apart, and he was obliged to circle each clearing to find a trace of parted bushes to keep the way.

That he was making down the hill was of some encouragement, and then suddenly, as he broke through the close growing brush, he came upon another clearing. On the ground lay Gale Sewell.

He had fallen, tripping, and his head had struck a large boulder. The skin was broken and a small stream of blood dyed his white face.

For a moment Bob hesitated. The man seemed so frail he felt certain he could lift him, but at the attempt his left wrist reminded him of his mishap and he was forced to give up the idea.

The farmhouse was below, and there help could be had. Making sure his companion was simply stunned, he leaped to his feet and quickly getting his bearing, headed straight down the hill, over rocks, clearing gullies, but breaking a wide broad trail as he went.

The road was finally reached, and turning to the right he started forward on the run.

Around a bend in the road he swung, to come suddenly upon a girl, leaning over some wayside blackberry bushes.

The sound of his steps startled her, and she wheeled upon him.

With a cry he came to a dead stop, for out from under the depths of a gay little sunbonnet looked the merry face of Meryl Sewell.

CHAPTER X

THE GNARLED OAK AND THE FLOWER

THE two stood staring at each other an instant, for the girl did not recognise in the coatless, mud-stained and dishevelled man before her her companion of the trip from Wolfboro.

Then suddenly she did, and with wonder and gladness in her eyes she came to him.

"Then you did come," she smiled; "you got my note!"

"You note?" His lips framed the words, though they were not uttered.

But suddenly she seemed to realise his condition. No hat, no coat, a torn sleeve, mud on his boots and the left wrist, red, swollen, and hanging limp.

"Oh!" she cried. "What has happened? What is it?"

He was fainter than he had thought, and as he stood staring stupidly, he half-reeled before he sank to the bank by the roadside.

She came to him, pushing back her sunbonnet, and it hung like a hood on her shoulders.

"What is it?" she cried, deep sympathy in her face. "What has happened you?"

"You!" he exclaimed. "Where have you been?"

"Didn't you get my note?" she asked, looking at him in wonder. "Then how did you come?"

He struggled to his feet. "Where have you been?"

"Why, here!" she nodded down the road. "You see, my uncle was away; yes," she added positively to his look of doubt, "he was called away suddenly on business, and he left word for me to stay here until he returned. Oh, it's the dearest, little old farmhouse, and I wander about in the woods—it's free, so free. There're no convent walls, Mr. Hernald. I'm really afloat."

"Who told you your uncle was away?" he demanded.

"Why, my uncle's secretary," the girl answered, drawing back a little at the sharp question.

Suddenly he shook his dazed wits together sufficiently to realise it was no time to seek explanations, and too, he suddenly remembered why he had come so quickly through the woods. It was certainly best not to frighten her.

"You are stopping at the house below here?"

The girl nodded, wonder in her eyes at his strange questions.

"I see," he agreed slowly, puzzled to know what the truth of the whole matter could be. If she had been carried off as they first supposed, he realised that he could not go to the farmhouse for help; yet, too, he must act quickly if he was to take advantage of their chance meeting and secure her release.

"Your uncle is above here," he explained, thinking only of some way to get her away from the road. "He and I started to walk over last night and lost our way in the woods. He's waiting up on the hill-side. Shall we go to him?"

"My uncle back? Why, they told me it might be another week or two. And he came for me himself?" The dark eyes brightened. "Oh, let us hurry!"

They turned quickly, and in another minute he was helping her up through the woods, over the rocks and gullies, through the bushes and briars which had been broken aside as he hurried down the hill.

It was harder work going back, and he paused every few feet to rest, though she was only too anxious to press on. But he held her back and forced a slow pace, for he was busy thinking.

What was he to do? Gale Sewell was still slightly delirious and he had gone for help. Instead of help—and yet, perhaps he had stumbled upon the very help that was needed.

The sight of his niece might instantly set Gale Sewell's mind clear, and so some facts mights be secured which would guide their future acts. Perhaps the people with whom Meryl Sewell had been stopping might be friends, after all, and yet he felt that to be impossible.

"On the way over," he explained with perfect frankness, "your uncle fell and hurt himself. Not much, you know, but still you must expect to find him a little

shaken up. You've never seen your uncle, have you?" he suddenly demanded, determined to settle that question.

"Why, no," she answered, a perplexed wrinkle on her broad forehead. "He was away."

"True! You did tell me that. Did you stop at Wilderness Lodge?"

"Oh, no. We came right to the little farmhouse, and I've been there ever since."

"And you haven't seen Kendon?" he questioned half absently, for his mind had turned to the glove. Perhaps, after all, it was not hers.

"Kendon? Oh, no! He had to hurry right away to join my uncle. He sent me word. Was it not odd? If we had waited a little longer at the hotel he would have been back. He tried to get over to see me before he went to Boston, but wasn't able."

"I see!" Bob nodded. He did see that a deft hand had been at work. All contingencies arranged for, all doubts killed; yet possibly overdone when the story and facts were both considered.

"When did my uncle get back?" she asked as they arose from the rocks upon which they had been resting and began to climb again.

"Why, I can't just say. I met him yesterday evening. We started to walk over her,—it was his idea,—but we lost our way."

"And have been in the woods all night?"

"Yes," Bob agreed, "and as your uncle is pretty

old the exposure has made him nearly ill. His fall, too, has hurt him,—but then,—as soon as we can get him back to Wilderness Lodge he'll be all right."

"We can get a carriage from Mrs. Darneau."

"Mrs. Darneau?"

"Why, yes. It is with her that I am stopping."

"Oh, I see! Mr. Sewell didn't mention the name."

Up through the bushes they toiled on. The girl's face trouble-free, except for the thought of her uncle, until Bob, slipping again, struck his hand a wicked blow, and then at the sight of the pain on his face she stopped and made him sit down. Her anxiety to help, her insistence that he rest while she made a sling for the arm, was coupled with such a pretty shyness that he could but feel well paid for his night's adventure. It was something indeed to be again of service to her.

With deft fingers she tied the long, gray strings of her sunbonnet together, she tore them from the bonnet before he could voice his protest, and gently she fastened them about his neck and placed the swollen arm so that the blood stopped that endless, nerve-racking throb, throb, throb.

The way down had seemed short, for he had cleared obstacles in the descent with a bound that must be toiled over going back, and yet finally they came upon the clearing. There he stopped his companion with a sign.

"Wait here," he whispered. "I'll go and prepare

him for your coming. He thought the world of your mother, and it might be a shock to him to see you suddenly. He's tired, you know, that's all." And then he moved quickly forward to see if Gale Sewell had yet come to his senses, or if he must prepare the girl for more than an old, dishevelled man, temporarily wandering in mind.

Great was his relief to find the tall, gaunt figure sitting on the ground in the middle of the little clearing, his eyes fixed on a blade of grass in his fingers.

Advancing quickly, he dropped on his knees before him.

"Meryl," Bob began, using the name he felt would best interest and soothe the strange nature he had to deal with, "Meryl has come."

"Meryl has come." The thin lips framed the words in a hardly audible whisper, while the deep sunken eyes sought the face of the younger man. It was a questioning, half understanding, groping look.

"Do you wish to see her?"

"Meryl has come."

"Your niece, Mr. Sewell!"

"But Kendon told me that they had taken her away." The eyes grew bright suddenly, and a strained note sounded in the voice, while under the restraining hand of the younger man the whole body seemed suddenly to gather itself together as the muscles grew taut.

Bob smiled reassuringly. "Kendon, I fear, was wrong, for Meryl has come to you."

"Kendon wrong! Kendon wrong! And she is here? She has come? Ah!" The thin, nervous fingers gripped Bob's wrist in a grasp that indicated a strength the frail frame belied. "Is she like—is she like——" And the other hand fumbled in the open shirt until it found and held the miniature.

Bob nodded. "Very much like her."

"Like my Meryl?" And now the look was pathetic. The eyes filled with tears—half of weakness, half of gladness—and the thin hands trembled.

"And she is anxious to see you, Mr. Sewell."

The white head nodded slowly and the lips parted in a faint smile. The man seemed suddenly content, the strained muscles relaxed, he rested satisfied.

"Ah, yes!" he smiled, seemingly trying to grasp the past and connect it somewhat intelligently with the present. "It was you who brought her. Let's see! Kendon said so—that proves it; he said you brought her, and I remember I met you on Rock Creek twice."

Here was a glimpse of clearness of mind indeed, and Bob rose quickly to take advantage of the mood.

"Stay right here and I'll bring her to you."

The gray head nodded, and the younger man hurried back to where the girl waited.

"You uncle is much better," he explained, "but please do not be surprised at anything he says. You see," he hastened on, grasping the first excuse he could lay hands upon, "his trip was full of business worries. Too, he is old and then the excitement of seeing you,

together with the night in the woods, has set his mind wandering a little. Don't speak of his trip or of your staying with Mrs.—what's her name?"

"Mrs. Darneau," Meryl answered, studying Bob's face in questioning wonderment.

"Yes, Mrs. Darneau," he continued, making a mental note of the name, so that he would be sure to recall it. "If he asks where you have been, simply say you were waiting for him. It may seem odd, but now we must not excite him. We must get him back to Wildernerness Lodge."

"I will be very careful, Mr. Hernald." The eyes were full of questions. "But—but—what is it? I don't understand. Is he very, very——"

"Oh, no," Bob hastened to add, fearing that in his endeavour to prepare her for her uncle's condition he had unduly frightened her. "No. He's just a bit mussed up—like I am," he laughed, "that's all."

"It seems," Meryl hesitated, her eyes dropping quickly and a faint flush spreading over her face, "it seems so strange. I never had a father or a mother, and I do want him to love me!"

"He can't help that," he assured her quickly.

By some strange quirk of the mind, he suddenly bethought himself of Marsden's doubt as to her being Meryl Sewell. At all events, if she was not, she did not know it. He had felt so from his recollection of their short ride together; now that impression was only heightened.

Marsden would see it at once. The dainty, curved lips, the fine nostrils, the eyes—big, open, frank—how could such a one be anything but what she claims to be? The thought that she was not should be pushed to the depths of Stygian darkness. It was too foul a thought to link to such a one as this.

They parted the bushes, and Meryl stepped slowly into the clearing. She was hardly prepared, even with the warning, for her uncle's strange garb and uncouth looks.

That he was tall and gaunt and decked with a shock of over-topping gray hair, she knew, for Kendon had painted a clear picture. Yet she advanced bravely.

Clear of the branches, she had hesitated just an instant with flushed face. In her throat there was a rising lump of welling hope and fear, for upon this man before her—so gray, so gaunt, so strange—depended so much. She did want him—to whom she had come from so far—to give to her that love which she had never known, which her heart had so often yearned for.

Gale Sewell, sitting as he had been left, gazed long and earnestly. In his left hand he held tightly the miniature, the clenched fist resting against the bare chest. His head was raised and the heavy rolls of loose flesh made his cheeks seem puffed under the eyes, driving them—coal black ones—seemingly deeper into his head. The head itself was thrust forward, as was his wont.

For a long moment the two gazed as the girl came

forward slowly, the heart of each beating high, the gnarled oak, with new life in its veins to find the flower of its dreams, ready, eager, longing for its shade.

The thin fingers over the miniature relaxed.

Was it to-day, was he a gnarled oak, or had forty years turned back? The two long arms reached out, and as the eyes brightened with gladness at the sight they saw, the thin lips framed her name.

Then she crossed the sod, going to him quickly.

CHAPTER XI

PLAYING THE INNOCENT

Bob turned, and leaning against the huge oak under which the girl had sat, idly began to pick pieces of bark from the trunk.

The look in Gale Sewell's eyes as his niece had crossed slowly to him—wonder in her eyes, too, at such a strange, dishevelled relative, yet, too, more than wonder—had told Bob the man had found the solace that his temporary unbalanced mind needed.

So he left the two to the quiet circle of the trees, and leaned wearily against the huge trunk. Briars in his flesh stung, his wrist burned and throbbed, while his whole body seemed to desire nothing but a soft place to rest upon.

The sun well up was now beating down fiercely, but a cool breeze came from the lake beyond, somewhere over the trees to the left. In that direction lay their way, but how to travel it?

Delirium had given Gale Sewell strength to come so far, and now that his brain had found the harbour it had been striving for, and clearness of vision had come with that shelter, reaction must follow.

He could hardly leave the two alone while he travelled back to Wilderness Lodge for help, and yet he did not

dare trust the house below. There Meryl had been held a prisoner, so surely it would not give help to the end of taking her back to Wilderness Lodge.

What then? If he only knew the inwardness of it all. Perhaps Gale Sewell could tell him now, and so he straightened painfully and turned toward the clearing.

As he parted the bushes the two looked up from their seat side by side upon the turf and Bob caught his breath to see the new look of beauty in the girl's eyes.

With a quick motion Gale Sewell held out his hand.

"He is responsible!" the old man cried with as near a smile as had been upon his lips for some time. "He has brought you to me."

"He has been very kind to me," Meryl nodded, her eyes smiling up into Bob's face, "very, very kind."

"Has he now?" Gale Sewell questioned. "Have you, Mr. Hernald?"

"If I have," the younger man made bold to answer, "it has been because Miss Sewell has been very, very kind to me. She has trusted me."

"But shouldn't one trust everybody?" the girl questioned, with a frankness that almost seemed to carry banter with it. "Isn't the world a big, happy playground? Isn't everyone kind?"

"It really is a happy playground," Gale Sewell philosophised, "if one always knows how to play. It's when we go contrary to the rules of the game that the play stops. Am I right, Mr. Hernald?"

"I think you are quite right," Bob nodded, glad at the soundness of the man's logic.

"I hope I am," and the older man brushed the heavy white hair back from his forehead with a weary, tired motion that made Bob realise he was living on the excitement of the moment and his strength was limited.

The need for them to hurry was very apparent, and so, persuading Gale Sewell to rise, he led him to one side.

"Do you know a Mrs. Darneau?" he asked, as they stopped by the edge of the clearing.

"Darneau? No. Who is she?"

"Your niece, since she was carried off, has been with her in the house below here on the road."

"Meryl in the house below here? Carried off?" And the eyes looked troubled as they fastened on his companion's face.

"Yes," Bob answered, yet knowing as he spoke that Gale Sewell's mind even yet refused to grasp what had happened. It would take a day or so of complete rest before he fully realised all that had occurred.

"But my niece is here. There!" And he turned to fasten his eyes on her, standing now. Her tall figure, slender and perfect against the green trees, made a picture satisfying indeed.

"And she is safe now," Bob hastened to add.

"Yes, safe—why, of course!"

"By the way," Bob questioned, changing his tone

with the subject, "do you know just how far we are from Wilderness Lodge?"

"How far? How far?" The eyes scanned the narrow clearing and then sought the face of his questioner again. "No. But we should hurry back."

What to do Bob Hernald did not know. He saw that help could not be had in any information gained from the man before him, for though he was sane enough, he was too tired, his brain too dazed, to be able to give clearly any information that would help.

His brother's wife had been his one heart's desire. Losing her, he had travelled, a weary man, finally to return to find there was a second Meryl. Then his every thought, his heart beats, his love, were turned to the child whom he could but feel was moulded in the same mould as the Meryl he had known.

Thus years had gone by and no substance had come of his dreaming. Then when it had seemed the worms were really in the heart of the oak, a misty shadow of hope opened with the receipt of Kendon's letter. Long waiting brought the messenger without the charge.

Then hours had been days, minutes, hours, and all that time the heart had bled, the eyes grown dim watching the picture over the bed—the picture of the one he hoped would be his in its second coming. Beside that thought all others were swept aside. He only knew she had not come—the reason why lost itself in the fact.

The slight fever, fed by such a disappointment, brought sudden delirium, and on a strength born of it

he had followed blindly until by some strange chance he had traced his wavering steps to fall exhausted where she roamed. Now he had her, and yet he could not guide the other with any facts.

"Wait," Bob suggested, while he stepped quickly to where the girl stood. She glanced up as he came to her, and the light in her eyes made his heart leap.

"I must get a carriage," he suggested.

"And I am to stay with him?"

"It will take me but a moment."

"We can be getting acquainted," and she reached out her hand to her uncle as he came to her quickly. Already she seemed to feel her power over him.

With a nod, Bob turned and once again made his way toward the road.

He was completely at sea. They were somewhere on the mountain side, not over-far from Wilderness Lodge and still too far to think of walking. Houses, he knew, were scarce thereabouts. The one below might be the only one for miles and yet he hesitated to go there.

Finally he reached the high bank above the road. At that point it ran through a slight gully, and as he paused, still pondering on what was best to be done, the sound of voices came to him.

"There's the pail!"

"Yes," came the answer with an oath, "but where's the girl? I told you it was a mistake to let her go so free."

"Mistake!" answered the first speaker. "Who in

hell are you to talk about mistakes? He said to do so. And why not? She suspects nothing. *She* wouldn't run away!"

"Well, she's gone!"

Bob moved slowly toward the edge of the bank and peered down through the bushes. Two men stood in the middle of the road, gazing up and down the dusty stretch.

"She must be somewhere about?"

"Must be!" exclaimed the one who had complained at the latitude allowed. "Must be nothing! Ten to one she's got away, and if she has, he'll raise thunder, and don't you forget it!"

"Shut up, will you?" the other exclaimed, with no little anger. "Ten to one she's within a stone's throw of us, and the first thing you know she'll be hearing you! What would happen if she ever got onto the truth? The thing can only work because she doesn't suspect."

"Doesn't suspect!" Bob caught the words with great relief. Then whoever she was, Gale Sewell's niece or no, she herself did not suspect. Yet even as he accepted the words as a confirmation of her innocence, he wondered what he should need them to confirm his belief in her.

"Yes, I suppose so," the other fellow agreed, lowering his voice and dropping onto the bank below where Bob lay. "Well, what's to be done? Wait here for her to turn up? If she does, it's all right. If she doesn't we get raked fore and aft for not looking for her."

"Looking for her!" the other repeated. "What's the use? If she's around here anywhere you can't find her, not in these woods."

"Well," the other exclaimed, "I'm not going to sit here. If she doesn't turn up pretty quick I'm going to let him know."

The other chuckled. "I suppose you'll have to, but Lord help you when you tell him!"

Bob stirred slowly. Here was the key to the whole matter. If he could in any way get these men to talk—if he could learn who "he" was. Force alone, however, would obtain any information from them, and force was clearly on their side.

But first of all he must care for Gale Sewell and his niece. If he could get them back safely to Wilderness Lodge and—— He paused suddenly as his eyes narrowed.

If he could get the two safely back and at the same time make sure of the men below.

To accomplish his purpose, first of all a carriage was necessary; also some information as to their whereabouts. The two men could furnish the latter, and possibly the former.

Quietly he made his way through the brush and when perhaps fifty yards below the men, slid down the bank and turning made his way along the road toward them.

A cheery whistle had announced his coming and both were on their feet when he swung into view and came to a stop with a surprised glance in their direction.

"Well, thank Heaven!" he exclaimed; "I've found somebody. Is this the way towards the Hanover Club?"

The taller of the two men moved forward slowly, making a sign to the other as he stepped out into the road.

"The Hanover Club is down the other way." The man came to a position—legs well apart—in the middle of the road, as if to block further advance.

"The other way?" Bob questioned, glancing back over his shoulder. "How far?"

"Ten miles."

"Ten miles! As far as that?" A low whistle of perplexity escaped him. "I've been on the mountain all night," he went on, "a friend of mine and I—we got lost. And we had a mishap, too. See! I've sprained my wrist——"

"Yes, I see," the man snapped out quickly, and then Bob realised for the first time that the two were examining with close attention the improvised sling in which his arm rested. He had forgotten the use to which Meryl Sewell had put her sun-bonnet strings.

"Are you from the house below here?" he asked, and as the nearer man nodded, he laughed. "Then you recognise this," he touched the yellow strip. "You see," he hurried on, "my friend and I—my friend is pretty old—got lost and we have been out all night in the woods. This morning we saw the smoke from your house and in hurrying this way, we both fell. I got a

sprained wrist, but my friend hurt his head. Then we met a young lady—she said I could get help from you. Also, she tied up my wrist and is staying with my friend up on the hill."

The two men were silent for an instant, and then a look passed between them. It seemed as if they had feared a too prying caller, for strangers were rare upon the mountain road. The story, however, sounded quite plausible, and, too, they had news of their charge, which was a relief in itself.

"Your friend's hurt, you say?" the taller man demanded, and Bob noted the tone was far less suspicious.

"Yes. I wanted to get a carriage to take us back to the Club. Could you help me out?"

"I reckon," came the slow answer. "Might as well make a dollar that way as not."

"How soon could you get it?"

"It's down at the house. Bill will harness her up. Go ahead, Bill!"

"And can you," Bob suggested, turning again to the spokesman of the two, "help me get my friend down through the woods? If we had a piece of rope we could tie some boughs together and carry him that way."

"Can't he walk?"

"No." Bob shook his head. "We'll have to make some kind of a litter for him. If we had a rope to tie some boughs together; and, too, to put around my neck"—he indicated a carrying rope by a motion of his hand—"you and I could get him down."

They reached the house, a small two-story building, and there the one addressed as Bill was left to harness the team, which it was arranged should be driven up the road to the spot where they had met. With the other man, a piece of strong rope being secured, Bob Hernald started back along the road.

"How far up the road is your friend?" the man questioned.

"Oh, only a little way," Bob answered, as scrambling up the high bank they made into the woods.

On up the steep hill they climbed, working off to the right,—Bob taking the lead,—until they were well out of earshot of both the house and the two waiting in the clearing.

So far the scheme had worked perfectly, but there was one thing more Bob Hernald wanted to make sure of, and so, as he tramped on in the lead, he demanded suddenly:

"Do you know Gale Sewell?"

"Gale Sewell!" the man exclaimed, startled by the sudden mention of the owner of Wilderness Lodge. "No! Why?"

"Do you know what he looks like, I mean?" Bob went on, turning upon his companion suddenly.

"No. Why? What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing. I was just wondering what he looks like," he answered, coming to a stop. "Would your friend know him if he saw him?"

"Neither of us know him. But what the deuce do

you mean?" The man's eyes narrowed as he stood watching his companion closely.

"Oh, I mean nothing," Bob laughed—a nervous laugh, too, for he felt he must have a guilty look; at at least, he knew that his heart was beating fast.

"Well, I don't understand you," the man protested.

"I suppose not," Bob snapped, "but that can't be helped."

"Can't be helped!" the other exclaimed. "Say, what's up?"

"What's up?" Bob's hand swung quickly to his hip pocket. "Your game!" and the levelled revolver covered the man steadily, indicating none of the nervousness Bob Hernald felt in playing such a part.

CHAPTER XII

THE SECURING OF A CONVEYANCE

For an instant the two eyed each other.

"Back up against that tree!" Bob Hernald ordered, his voice sharp, commanding.

"Are you crazy, or joking?" the man demanded, holding his ground.

"Neither; in fact," his anger suddenly leaping to the front, "I've a good mind to give you a thorough licking. I don't care to kill you, though I dare say you deserve it."

"Say, what are you giving us?" the other exclaimed. "You must be crazy!"

"Perhaps I am, but you back up to that tree."

The man took three steps backward, and paused.

"Say, what's the game?"

"Back, quick!" And Bob let the words slip out like a sharp explosion. He saw that there was positive need of impressing the other.

The man moved backward until he was standing straight against the oak.

"Now that rope," Bob ordered, "drop it!"

It fell at the man's feet.

"Kick it to me!"

A sullen look had fallen on the man's face, but he obeyed.

A problem faced Bob then, and he realised it fully.

The fellow saw the look of pain flash across his face as the rope hung in the injured hand, and he smiled grimly.

"I don't know just what your idea is, but you'd better put aside any plan of tying me up. Come near enough so that I can get my fingers on you and I'll wring your damned neck."

"Looking at it that way," Bob nodded, willing for the instant to consider the best course to follow, "you stay where you are and answer questions."

"Answer nothing!" the fellow snapped. "You and your damned lies about a night in the woods and a sick friend—— What in hell is your game, and where's that girl you spoke of—yes, where's that girl?"

"Stop!" Bob ordered sharply, as the other started toward him. "Get back to that tree! Quick, or I'll put a bullet into you so you'll have to keep quiet. Get back! Do you hear me?" The man stood sullen, hesitating. "Come!" Bob's voice grew cold. "You do as I tell you, or I'll smash that shin bone of your's so you won't walk for a while." And the pistol was lowered from the man's face till it covered his leg.

"There," Bob nodded as the fellow stepped back again, "that's better. Now you listen to me. I can shoot, and I generally hit what I aim at. You can answer questions and keep placidly cool for a while. No harm is meant you yet."

"Yet!"

"Yes, yet! Personally, I feel you should be horse-whipped; but the law will attend to that—as kidnapping is dealt with pretty severely up here in New Hampshire. I think the farmers around would consider lynching almost the best way to care for you."

"Kidnapping!" the man whispered, and his voice went husky all of a sudden. "What—what do you mean?"

"By the way!" Bod demanded, paying no attention to the question. "You don't come from these parts, do you? Where is your home? We'll let that pass." He waved his hand as the man shut his lips together tightly. "But to the point. What do you know of Meryl Sewell?"

"Meryl Sewell!" The man repeated the name absently and shook his head.

"Well, then," Bob tried again, "what do you know of the girl you and your friend Bill were looking for on the road? The one who made me this sling?"

"What do you know of her yourself?"

"Oh, a great deal more than you fancy," Bob laughed. "Hold on! Get back!" The revolver was levelled again. "Yes, a great deal more than you fancy. But that's not the point. What do *you* know?"

"Nothing that I'll tell you," the man answered.

"I suppose not," Bob agreed. He knew that by now the carriage was evidently waiting, and too, he feared to leave Gale Sewell and his niece any longer than was absolutely necessary.

"Now just remember this," he began stepping forward, "hurt as my wrist is I can still use it." Quickly he slipped the revolver into his left hand and seized the end of the rope in his right. "You'll do no neck wringing. Stand straight against that tree, hand to your sides, and keep still! I'm going to tie you up or kill you! Take your choice."

But the fellow was no coward, and besides, he knew well that the one before him, whatever his purpose might be, would hesitate to shoot. As Bob stepped close to him, he leaped forward, striking out with both fists. The blow that fell on the injured wrist sent the pistol flying out of reach of both of them, yet carried the fellow so much off his balance that, as Bob side-stepped, he staggered to his knees.

With a leap Bob was on him before he could regain his balance, and the two, locked in each other's grasp, went to the ground.

For a brief instant it was a quick, pawing struggle, the fellow striving to slip away, Bob Hernald to hold him. Then real anger seized them both. Blows had fallen,—and locked in each other's arms they rolled down the hillside, a struggling, fighting mass, each trying to get a grip upon the other that would tell. First one had the mastery, and then by a quick twist the other slipped from the encircling grip and half struggling to his knees bent all his energies to the end of forcing the other to the ground.

The man fought like one possessed. Mad he was, and

blow upon blow rained down upon Bob Hernald's ribs, while now and again his long fingers tore bloody streaks across the other's face, yet Bob held to him with a circling grip.

Feeling he must break his opponent's grip, the man's arms circled Bob Hernald's waist, trying to pin close his arms, while with his clenched fist he could strike a blow that would end the struggle. Twice he nearly succeeded, for with his injured wrist, Bob was at a decided disadvantage.

Then suddenly the struggle seemed to cease. Both lay still, clinging to the other, while their breath came in sharp, indrawn gasps. It was but a pause in which each tried to concentrate his failing strength for one final effort.

The man was half under Bob Hernald, and yet his grip was one from which the fellow could slip away, unless made more secure. If he could once get his sound hand upon the man's throat he would have the mastery. Like a creeping thing, his arm moved slowly up the man's body while his head, buried in the other's side, helped hold him down. Over the shoulders the arm slipped, and then, as with a quick grip, his fingers would have closed upon the other's throat, the man, realising what was intended, threw his whole strength into a mighty effort to dislodge his opponent.

With a wrench he drew his feet up under him, half raised on his elbows, and the next instant the two were again rolling over and over down the hill side, a strug-

gling, clinging mass, the pine needles and wiry grass giving no sure footing to either.

On they rolled, and then with sickening thud, the two, so locked together it seemed impossible to distinguish one from the other, brought up against a low tree stump, the full force of the contact falling upon Bob's Hernald's back.

His grip was broken, and with an oath of exultation the man wrenched himself free and blindly staggered to his feet. A tree was straight before him, but he saw it too late, as with a crash he plunged full tilt into the huge trunk. Down he went, half stunned, and with a leap Bob was over him again as he came to his feet. Out shot his fist, and the fellow went down, a limp heap.

Spent though he was, it took him but a moment to find the revolver again, and also the rope, dropped at the beginning of the struggle. With it he made the fellow fast, hand and foot.

"There!" he muttered, gazing down for an instant on the limp form, while his breath came in quick gasps, "you can lie there." And wheeling he set off on a run through the woods in the direction Gale Sewell and his niece must be waiting.

Once as he climbed over a ledge of bare rock he paused to adjust his clothing, now more torn and tattered than before. The left sleeve to his shirt was literally in shreds, while on his forehead and cheeks were the deep marks of his opponent's finger-nails.

The sun-bonnet sling was a crumpled mass about his

neck, and he smoothed it gently as he thought of the one who had so quickly and thoughtfully fixed it for him. His wrist, now more painful than before, had need of it, and he quickly slipped his arm through the crumpled strip.

Then brushing the dirt from his knees and wiping what grime he could from his face and hands, he went on through the woods.

To find the two was a harder task than he had expected, for he had led the man far from the spot where they waited. At last he got his bearings and came slowly to the clearing.

As he drew near a sudden fear assailed him that they would have grown impatient at his long absence, but the sound of the girl's perfect voice came to his ears to relieve his anxiety.

"I am very, very happy, uncle," she was saying. "I never knew I had anyone in the whole world. But I have—I have you—and you must let me do everything for you."

The reply was inaudible, but Bob felt a lump rising quickly in his throat.

Was this brief morning to be the happiest time for the two? If they could only be left here to live their lives, instead of going back to the mystery of Wilderness Lodge, the very place itself seemed dark with mystery—when the question of who she was must be taken up.

Then, even as he paused an instant over the puzzle

awakened by the sound of her voice, came the reassuring thought that one of the men who had been her jailer was a prisoner on the mountain side. Unless his plans miscarried sadly, he would also have the other. From these two, all the information needed could undoubtedly be had. In fine, why puzzle over something so nearly solved? All he had to do was to get the two safely back to Wilderness Lodge, incidentally taking the second man along a prisoner, and then come back for the one tied up in the woods. All he had to do was to carry out his plans, and yet even as he felt that was all, he found himself hesitating, waiting on the fringe of bushes, listening to the low notes of the girl's voice. He seemed to be moving in a half daze. The lack of sleep, the wounded wrist, the fight just ended, were uniting to a clouding of his faculties at a time when he needed all his wits.

Finally he stirred and, pulling himself together with an effort, parted the bushes.

The girl leaped to her feet and with a cry came toward him. Her arms were held out from her side with an odd stiffness, the fingers spread apart and on her face was a look of puzzled wonder.

"Oh!" she cried, with a deep in-drawn breath as she stood before him, hesitating, bewildered. "What has happened? You are hurt!"

"I fell," he hastened to explain with perfect truthfulness. "It's nothing!"

But she held her ground while her eyes searched his face. He hesitated, there seemed to be some power in

her look that held him, waiting for her to put further question or to step aside.

"Fell!" she repeated, her voice dropping to a whisper, and then her eyes travelled over his torn clothes from where the dark soil had been ground into his knees to the ripped sleeve and rumpled hair.

"I'm not very pretty to look at," he laughed, casting a glance over her shoulder towards Gale Sewell.

"Oh!" she exclaimed suddenly, coming even closer to him, "there is trouble. Before you were torn, you were hurt, yes,"—her breath was caught quickly,— "there is trouble, and you and I," she paused an instant, "yes, I feel I am part of it. I understand that much.

She spoke slowly, but her words implied more question than anything else. She seemed to feel suddenly that all was not right. That in some way there was something behind their meeting; and too, that she was concerned in the matter as well as this strange, gaunt uncle of hers and this man who lightly did things and made no mention of them.

He looked deeply into her dark eyes and though he saw there the hesitating look as he had that day in Wolfboro, he yet suddenly felt that she would aid him in the unravelling of the puzzle.

He cast a swift glance over her shoulder again and she nodded quickly.

"Yes," she whispered, "he must not know."

His eyes flew to hers again, for the understanding

that she showed puzzled him. Her eyes held his—the perfect lips he noted—the charm in the wavy lines of her glorious hair. It seemed as if he was moving in a dream, and that suddenly the good fairy of his guidance met his gaze. He felt fascinated, hardly realised he was staring straight at her, and then—he caught his breath as he almost found himself stepping to her quickly and seizing her in his arms.

With a strange smile, he shook himself like a huge animal. Could she who moved him so, who threw such a spell over his very wits, be a stranger to this big, pulsing, puzzling world? Perhaps the instant understanding that she seemed to possess was merely the alert intuition of one who quickly understands, or perhaps it was due to the deeper knowledge she possessed. Marsden had said an accomplished actress would be needed.

Did one stand before him?

Why could he not put that riddle aside?

Slowly he passed his hand across his brow, as if to brush away more than the throbbing pain in the temples.

"We must hurry," he muttered.

"And later I must know all," she asserted. Yet even as she did, a rich flush mounted to her cheeks, and then suddenly she stepped quickly to one side, the eyes that had held his so steadily dropping under their heavy lashes.

He felt the change instantly, yet she was anxious to help, hoping to share some of the difficulties, or—and

again, even as he stepped to Gale Sewell's side, came that thought—or an accomplished substitute.

He must be very, very tired, he reasoned, not to be able to shake off a thought he knew was wrong. Yet, ever since the suggestion had been made to him, he had kept harping upon it, going over and over each word she had said to him in the hotel and on their ride from Wolfboro. Thus he had no good reason to marvel that the same question should arise with added insistence as he met her again.

Forcing himself to action, he helped Gale Sewell to his feet and led the two from the clearing and down the hill side.

Finally they neared the road, and there Bob stopped.

"Sit here," he said, indicating a log. "I must go on. When I call you come straight down the bank and along the road. I'll be waiting with the carriage.

Gale Sewell sank to the log without a word. But the girl hesitated, rached out her hand, drew it back as quickly and nodded silently. In her eyes, however, was a strange longing to speak and on her lips it seemed to him there hung an unspoken "Be careful!"

"I'll be but a moment," he added, and was gone.

Gaining the road he made certain the carriage was waiting. Then calling back for the two to follow, he hurried toward the vehicle.

The man, roused by his call, watched him approach, and hailed as he drew near.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing," Bob answered, as he reached the side of the buckboard and climbed into the seat beside the man. As he did so, his right arm slipped along the back of the seat, while in his left held behind him, his revolver rested.

"Didn't you get him?"

"Yes. They're coming."

The man turned quickly as the two approached, while Bob, every nerve on edge, watched him closely.

"Say," the man exclaimed, "what's up? Where's Frank? I thought the old chap couldn't walk?"

"He seems able to do so now," Bob suggested, and then as he heard the footsteps by the carriage he added over his shoulder, "Get in!"

The carriage tilted twice, and out of the corner of his eye. he caught a glimpse of the two on the back seat.

"Pick up the reins and drive on." The order came sharp, determined.

"What in—what's up?" the fellow exploded, swinging around to the one at his side. "She ain't going! Where's Frank, where's——"

"Drive on!" Bob broke in and his left arm moved quickly across his knees, the pistol ready, while his right hand slipped about the man's shoulders at the same time.

As quickly as he moved the man seemed to divine his purpose. As his eyes fell on the shining barrel of the revolver he turned like a flash, slipping clear of the hand

upon his shoulder, and with a leap swung over the wheel. The next instant he dove in among the roadside bushes.

Bob watched him go, too tired to think of following. Too, Gale Sewell's face had taken on quick alarm at the man's sudden flight, and he turned instantly to him.

"It's all right," he laughed reassuringly. "He didn't want to drive us, that's all," and with that, gathering up the reins, he sent the team down the road toward Wilderness Lodge.

CHAPTER XIII

A SAFE RETURN

On under the shady trees they drove, the strangeness of such an ending to their night's adventure uppermost in Bob Hernald's mind.

A dozen puzzling questions were on his lips, but he held his curiosity in check and simply strove to set the two at ease.

Gale Sewell lay back, his eyelids closed, the high flush on his cheeks marking the possible return of the fever that had left him during the night.

Meryl, too, suddenly felt quiet, and so the three drove on at the best speed possible.

It was close to noon when they turned up the winding drive under the huge oak and stopped before the open doors to Wilderness Lodge.

A gardener was in sight, working away on some nearby flower bed, and at Bob's summons came forward to take the team. Then helping Gale Sewell from the carriage, he conducted the owner of Wilderness Lodge toward the library.

There he and Meryl made him as comfortable as possible on one of the huge couches.

"His strength seems almost gone," she whispered, turning to Bob, anxiety in her eyes.

"He is a little over-tired—you know he is not strong," he hastened to assure her, for he could see that she did not at all understand the situation so suddenly thrust upon her.

For a moment the two stood side by side, watching the flushed face, and then Bob bestirred himself quickly.

"The doctor must be here somewhere. I'll look for him—you wait." And he turned toward the hall, when, instead, he longed to comfort her,—to explain in some way such a strange entrance to the home upon which she had so counted.

Reaching the front door he motioned to the gardener, and scribbling a brief note on a card, bade him take the waiting team and drive quickly to Mr. Marsden's. Then turning back to the hall he paused, undecided what to do.

But the night before he had found the place as quiet and unresponsive as the grave, and now the huge pillared hall seemed like a silent tomb. He stood listening to the distant bell he had set in motion, wondering in what direction he should begin his search for help.

As he waited, searching the dark shadows of the hall and winding stairs, the distant sound of an opening door fell on his ears. The next instant another door slammed and then in the far corner of the hall—where the shadows under the balcony were dark and heavy—another slowly opened and the dishevelled head of the old servant peered out.

With a bound Bob was across the hall, for while he trusted Kendon but little, he welcomed the sight of anyone who knew the twists and turns of the house.

The servant stepped into the hall and stood waiting, his eyes, still bloodshot, gleaming with a wild joy at the sight of the man before him.

"You!" he cried with a half snarl, "you!"

Bob Hernald was in no mood to parley or to take note of the other's manner.

"Come!" he ordered, stepping beyond Kendon and throwing open the door behind him, disclosing a small room. "I've something to say to you. In with you. Be quick!"

For an instant Kendon stood irresolute. Then yielding to the commanding note in the other's voice, turned and without a word, followed him into the room.

"And I've a word to say to you, too," the old servant flung out as the door closed behind them. "To you and Mr. Marsden. I've waited here for him. He's not at his house—I've been there. His servants are back here—where they went I can't say, but they were away last night; but he will come, and you, you are here now——"

"Stop!" The order fell from Bob Hernald's lips like a pistol shot. He was too tired to listen to wild speeches, his nerves too near breaking to stand them.

"Suppose you stop that wild harangue of yours. I don't know what possesses you, and what's more I don't

care. Now I want to tell you that Mr. Sewell is back and with him is his niece. Mr. Sewell must be got to bed at once. Where's his room?"

The words had an electric effect on Kendon. For an instant he stood staring stupidly, his lips trying to frame words they would not utter while his hand went out to steady himself. Bob sprung to his side and helped him to a chair.

"Here!" Kendon found voice at last. "Here, and Miss Meryl too? Here?"

"Yes, and Mr. Sewell is badly used up. Where's the doctor?"

"Here!" Kendon muttered again. "Here!"

Bob Hernald swore softly. It seemed as if he had only madmen to deal with. He would have given worlds then—when he himself was nearly dead with pain and loss of sleep—for one person in his normal senses.

With an effort he pulled himself together and stepped to Kendon's side.

"Come!" he ordered, letting his hand fall on the other's shoulder. "Pull yourself together, man. You must! Mr. Sewell is ill, I tell you. He's been out of his head all night. I found him in the woods. Do you understand?" he added, as he saw he must give Kendon some explanation to bring him to his senses. "I've brought him back—Miss Sewell, too. Pull yourself together and help me get him to his room."

Slowly Kendon rose to his feet, and with shaking hands brushed the hair back from his forehead. As he

turned to look into Bob Hernald's face the tears stood in the weak red eyes.

"Safe!" he cried, "and you found them both. Have I wronged you, sir? Have I wronged you both?"

"I don't know what you've done, and at this moment I don't care," Bob answered, a deep breath of relief at the new look on Kendon's face.

"But I have, sir. I have wronged you!" Kendon cried again, and the look, the tone, the expression told the other the man was normal once more.

"All right," Bob agreed, "let it go at that. Now listen! Is the doctor here?"

"Yes, he's upstairs. He's been looking everywhere for Mr. Sewell."

"I should have thought he would."

"But I was afraid——"

"Afraid?"

"That he—that is, I——" And again Kendon faltered and stopped.

For an instant Bob thought to press the point, but decided to let it go for the present.

"Come!" he cried. "Let's get Mr. Sewell upstairs."

Kendon found the doctor, and to him Bob quickly explained what had occurred.

Between them they moved the owner of Wilderness Lodge to his room, and there Bob left him to Bashton's care.

In the hall he stopped at a word from Kendon, who had hurried after him. The old servant's manner, where

before it had been brusque and suspicious, was now deferential and more than servile.

"Oh, sir!" he cried, "I have been wrong, very wrong!"

"Let it pass," Bob protested, too tired and weary to listen. "Come with me. Miss Sewell is in the library, and you must look out for her. Tell her her uncle is all right—and then get her to her room. She has gone through enough the last few hours to need rest." It seemed nothing out of the way for him to be directing matters and Kendon accepted his orders without question.

"But you, sir—you are hurt!"

"I'll let Doctor Bashton fix my wrist later, now I must find Mr. Marsden."

Kendon protested, with great concern, against his doing else but rest, but Bob hurried down the hall and to the library.

"Kendon will attend to you now," he explained quickly, as Meryl turned to him with a glad cry. "Your uncle is all right. Doctor Bashton will fix him up without delay, and very soon you can go to him."

"I want to do what I can."

"You can do a great deal," he answered her, with a smile. "But go with Kendon now and let him care for you."

"But you?"

"I? Oh, I've got one or two matters to attend to. It's all right," he hurried on, "don't worry about me,

and don't bother your head over anything," he added, lowering his voice. "All will be explained in a little bit. Ask no questions of anyone until I get back. It will be this evening. Then I will explain everything to you."

"But you are hurt terribly—you——"

"Yes, I know." He laughed almost gaily. "I'm a terribly disreputable sight, but never you mind me. You go and rest. Mr. Marsden had your trunks brought over from Wolfboro. Come,"—he turned to Kendon who stood waiting patiently by the window—"show Miss Sewell to her room. Get rested and then you may see your uncle. Oh, yes," he laughed—"breakfast, Kendon. Miss Sewell is famished, I know. Some berries and cream. Let someone serve her quickly." And with a cheery nod and a promise to be back by evening, if not before, he hurried from the room, the eyes of the girl full of deep longing following him as he went.

Kendon led the way and Meryl Sewell soon found herself in as dainty a suite of rooms as she could have hoped for, if her fondest fancies had led her thoughts in such a direction.

"Your uncle had these prepared for you," Kendon explained, "and there is a maid waiting, too. She is but a poor one, I fear, Miss Meryl"—Kendon's ideas of a proper servant were not to be equalled by any secured thereabouts—"for she is only a country girl. But I will send for her, now that you are safely back at Wilderness Lodge."

"A maid!" the girl cried. "Oh, I do not need one—I know I do not!"

"But your uncle will wish it. He arranged for her, and she was to come as soon as sent for. I will have her here by night." Then the old servant hurried away, a strange exaltation in his heart at the sudden return of the two.

From the library Bob Hernald hurried to his car, still waiting where he had left it the night before, and in another second was speeding down the long avenue and out into the country road toward the Marsden estate, a few miles beyond.

As he had leaned over the car before starting, his head had suddenly grown dizzy, and for an instant as he straightened slowly he had clung to the car's side, the trees, the covered porch and the red car itself a dancing blur.

Now as he put the car to its best speed, he found with a sudden rush, the same feeling fastening again upon him. His head did not really pain, yet it felt full, while a rumbling, numb ache seemed to be playing up and down the base of his brain.

"Hell!" he muttered, slowing the car down until it only seemed to crawl. "It's no time to go over. If Marsden can get two or three men, in a half hour we should have that fellow I left tied up on the mountain side. With him in jail, we can get the other, or, at least, get at the bottom of the thing. I must hurry."

He was talking aloud to himself, as if someone was

by his side questioning his every act. "I must go on," he muttered, "it's only because I haven't had anything to eat. Something to eat and a nap—that's what I need, a nap." And again he pushed up the speed.

But it was no use. The landscape would go around—trees danced by not as properly behaved trees should, but up and down and around. The dusty road seemed only too anxious to rise up before him and hurl itself down in a gray-brown powdery mass to smother the car and him together.

So again he was forced to a slow speed and the car crawled along, while he found more comfort. The trees kept fairly still and the nasty, full feeling in his head was less oppressive.

Still the blinding pain in his left wrist reminded him of his fall, while the tattered, flying sleeve—he was still without a coat—spoke of the utterly disreputable appearance he must be making.

The road seemed never-ending. He found himself counting the trees and wondering if it took so long to pass six, how long it would take at the speed he was going to reach the Club or Wolfboro, when there must be six times six hundred trees to pass.

The hum of the motor seemed laboured and a sudden fear assailed him that it might stop. If it did, he believed he would just let it go and seek the sleep he needed there in the car.

Why press on? Kendon had said Marsden was away,

so of course he wouldn't find him, even after he had travelled the long, never-ending road.

Then the thought of Meryl Sewell came to spur him out of his dazed condition, and so, half wondering if he too was not going off his head, he finally came to the Marsden place. Turning in at the avenue he reached the house just as the gardener he had sent over came down the steps.

"Mr. Marsden just got here, sir. I've given him your message."

Bob's troubled gaze took in the Marsden car, going down the long avenue toward the garage, and then Marsden himself appeared at the front door. In each hand he held a bit of paper. One was Bob's note—and his bewildered gaze travelled quickly from the sheet to the tattered and dirty figure that came up the steps toward him.

"Got it?" Bob muttered, motioning to the note.

"Got it?" Marsden repeated. "Yes, but, Heavens, man, what's happened? You look near dead, and here—here's a note from Bashton, dated last night, late, saying Sewell's lost, and here,"—he held out Bob's card—"you say you have him." He began to read. "'Sewell found; also—something. *Come at once.*'"

"Also Meryl!"

"Also who?" Marsden exploded.

"Miss Sewell," and Bob sat down suddenly in a huge arm-chair.

With a bound Marsden was at his side, his hand gripping the other's shoulder.

"What!" he fairly shouted.

"Don't." Bob stirred uneasily, for the lawyer's grip hurt. "Don't. That shoulder's lame—getting lame."

"But, man,"—Marsden shook the note in the other's face,—"you say here you've found her. Why, you must be crazy."

Then Bob suddenly remembered why he had come, when for the moment he had forgotten everything but the softness of the chair's cushions. With an effort he straightened.

"I guess I am," he muttered.

But Marsden wanted facts. "Come!" the lawyer insisted. "I went away last night—yesterday afternoon—and just got back. Tell me, if you can, what's occurred. Here's a note from Bashton saying Gale Sewell's disappeared, and Kendon has gone temporarily off his head. You say you've found Sewell and the girl, too. Why, man, you went down the right road yesterday. How could you?"

Bob listened in a dazed way, really without hearing the lawyer's words at all. He was trying first to stop the pounding in his head and get his focus on things adjusted.

Slowly he pulled himself up straight.

"You get your car, Marsden," he began. "I can't run mine. My damned head is all fuzzy—blur—sort of—so you get yours and I'll take you to the place,

I've got a fellow tied up, and the house—I haven't been there yet—ought to be searched. Perhaps we can get the other one too."

"Got a fellow tied up!" Marsden repeated. "God, man! I do believe you're off your head."

"Everyone's crazy," Bob muttered, thinking of the old servant and Gale Sewell.

"I guess they are, and you're more so than the others when you say you've found the girl."

"Get your car! Get your car! I've got her and the men too; no, one of the men—Frank. Bill got away."

"Frank! Bill!" Marsden sat down suddenly by the other's side. Carefully he led him over the story of events since the night before.

A heavy scowl settled slowly over the lawyer's face as he got the facts. A deep flush burned high on his temples while his eyes flashed as he called a servant and ordered his car again.

"That's right!" Bob agreed, with a deep sigh, content that he had at last found someone that could understand what was wanted and would get into action.

"But you're not going!" Marsden answered, whirling suddenly. "Why, man," he laughed, "you're in no shape. You're near dead, and, too, I guess you've done enough. I'll take a couple of men and we'll nail these fellows."

"Guess I'll go," Bob answered, pulling himself to his feet.

"Well, drink this first." And Marsden handed him a full glass of wine as a servant appeared with a tray.

Bob drained the liquor with a gulp and with Marsden's help sank back slowly into his chair.

"The car will be here in a minute," the lawyer added, and turning moved slowly to the edge of the porch.

Bob nodded and settled back comfortably to wait. The servant stood in the doorway—Marsden at the edge of the porch, fingering his watch chain impatiently, while he suddenly seemed to care little whether the car came or not. And then, as everything seemed to Bob to grow more and more comfortable the automobile ran up the avenue, and Marsden with a bound hurried toward it. As he went he called back to the waiting servant:

"Get him washed and to bed at once. If Doctor Bashton can get over have him come and fix up that wrist. Tell the doctor I gave him a powder that will keep him quiet for the day." And then turning to the chauffeur: "Hurry! Down the road! The mountain road to Larmer."

Bob heard the words indistinctly, caught the meaning, tried to rise, and then, as if very far away, there floated back to him the dying notes of the motor. His eyes closed slowly, the dull pounding let up and the cushion of the big chair seemed suddenly very soft and comfortable.

CHAPTER XIV

FOR HER SAKE

EARLY that evening Bob Hernald woke from a sleep that had been long and restful, to find Doctor Bashton seated by his bedside.

The physician nodded a cheery greeting as the eyelids opened.

"Well," he inquired, "feeling better?"

For a moment Bob was a bit at sea, though his head was clear and his muscles rested—even if still a trifle sore. He found a second necessary before he could collect his scattered senses and piece together the disjointed dreams that had been racing widely through his brain.

"Mr. Marsden sent me over," the doctor explained; "couldn't get here before—— Oh, yes, Mr. Sewell is doing nicely. His racket has shaken him up a good deal, but I'm sure he'll be all right in a few days. His niece will help to that end."

"Mr. Marsden is back?" Bob demanded. "Did he——" But he stopped, not feeling he could get the information wanted from the man before him.

"He is with Mr. Sewell. Asked me to come here and straighten you out. I've brought some clean clothing for you; Mr. Marsden got it from the Club, and if you'll get dressed I'll take a good look at that wrist."

"When did Mr. Marsden get back?"

"Late this afternoon. Came right over while he stayed with Mr. Sewell, and I've been here for perhaps an hour."

It took Bob Hernald but a short time to climb into clean clothes and have his wrist—it had simply suffered a bad sprain—tightly bandaged.

Then once again he found himself travelling back over the dusty road to Wilderness Lodge.

The uncertainty of landscape that had troubled him earlier in the day was gone, and while he felt a bit sore in spots and a faint headache reminded him of the worse one he had had, he was in reality feeling quite fit.

"By the way," he suddenly demanded; "when did you find Mr. Sewell was gone?"

"Why, this morning," the doctor explained. "Kendon was to sit up with him last night—that is, rest in the room next to him, where he could be called if anything was needed. This morning I found Kendon and Mr. Sewell both gone. A hunt disclosed Kendon,—the fellow was half crazy over Mr. Sewell's disappearance,—and finally I got the meagre facts out of him that some time early yesterday evening, just after I had gone to bed, I should say, Mr. Sewell had disappeared. Why Kendon had not called me I don't know. We hunted the house over, and then I went for Mr. Marsden. He was away, but I left a note and continued the search as best I could."

"Where were Mr. Marsden's servants last night?"

"Out, both of them. Mr. Marsden let them go, leaving Kendon and me alone."

"I see," Bob nodded, understanding why there had been no answer to the bells he had rung.

"I was utterly in the dark," the doctor went on. "No word came from Mr. Marsden, and I couldn't account for Mr. Sewell's absence."

"How do you account for his getting up at all?"

"From what you say of his actions, he must have been seized with sudden delirium. He had a slight fever yesterday afternoon. I fancy Kendon got talking to him about his niece after I went to bed, and then when Kendon had gone to lie down, Mr. Sewell dozed off. He may have dreamed—in fact, he might possibly have been half asleep, when you first met him."

"He seemed more like a man temporarily out of his mind."

"I judge so," Bashton nodded. "As least, he's lucky to be strong enough to stand such a night."

"You think no harm is done?"

"He'll be himself again. You know he was not really so terribly ill. I came up here more to rest than because there was any real need of me to care for him. Mr. Marsden asked me up, and I gladly accepted the chance."

"I thought Mr. Marsden said he was quite ill?"

"Only worrying over his niece," Bashton explained. "Now that she has arrived, he'll be in shape, and in no time."

The night was rich with the cool odours of the woods, and far away, as they neared the entrance to Wilderness Lodge, one could look straight down to where below the lake lay, bathed in perfect moonlight.

Where the light fell the waters danced in golden flecks—a long, straight shaft of light bordered by a far-reaching brightness that faded into the darker shadows of the waves. The islands and shore formed a low ghostly-black border—irregular with its points and breaks—in which was cast the whole far expanse of the great sheet.

Bob brought the car to a pause at the crest of the hill as Bashton pointed to the lake below. "I've seen that lake in a hundred different lights—early morning, noon, and night, and it's never the same twice."

Bob leaned forward, his elbow on the wheel.

"Look at the water now! It's perfect! Perfect! Ah, Winnepesaukee is a great sheet. No," he answered Bashton's direct remark, "it's never the same. It's always new, always perfect. Stormy or fair weather, when she's smooth as a millpond or when the sea's running six foot waves—it's always a picture." Anxious to learn of Marsden's trip, Bob turned from the picture and swung the car into the drive. The lawyer, waiting with some impatience for their arrival, heard their approach and was on the steps to meet them.

"If you'll run up to Mr. Sewell, doctor," he suggested. "Send the young lady to bed, will you? She's had a heart-breaking day and needs the rest. If you'll

try the library, Mr. Hernald, I'll be with you in a moment."

He followed the doctor to the stairs and spoke to him again in a low voice. Then turning back he crossed the hall and closing the door behind him moved to where Bob waited, with what patience he could summon.

"Well?" the younger man demanded as the lawyer dropped into the chair beside him.

For a moment Marsden studied the other, a strange expression—half perplexity, half hesitancy—on his face. Then he dropped back into the depths of the arm-chair.

"There was no one there, no one anywhere—on the hill or at the house."

"No one there?" Bob demanded, sitting straight in astonishment.

"No one there," Marsden answered, with a shake of the head, while a troubled smile played across his face.

"No one—— Why, man, I tied that fellow up, and Miss Sewell, she's been staying there; she's been there ever since the night she was carried off."

"At the house on the Larmer road?"

"Yes. Why, she told me so, and the men—one called Bill, the other Frank—they were looking for her when I ran across them. Why, look here, I went down to the house,"—a sudden pause,—"it did look kind of closed up, curtains drawn and all that, but the team. Why, of course there were people there."

"Well, the thing beats me," Marsden protested, let-

ting his hands fall with a sharp blow on the arms of the chair, while he rose to his feet and began slowly to pace back and forth across the room. "I took the road, the mountain road, to Larmer. The house is there, as you described it, but it's deserted. Why, do you know," he came to a stop before the other, "that house belongs to Gale Sewell? It's on his property."

"Belongs to Mr. Sewell?"

"There are a lot of them around here that belong to him. When he bought the land he bought houses and all. That was one of them. To get the people out at once—it was a strange freak of his, for they couldn't possibly disturb him—he purchased furniture, farm implements, horses, cattle, everything; that house was one. It's furnished now, the same old stuff that was in it when the people—Burts, I think was the name—left. It has been closed ever since."

"Who has the keys?"

"Mr. Sewell, I expect, though I don't know."

"But it couldn't have been occupied this morning and closed now," Bob urged. "You must have missed the spot."

"I found the house and, too, a place where someone had torn the ground up pretty well on the mountain side, and this. Is it yours?" And the lawyer held out a small knife with the letters "R. J. H." engraved on the handle.

Bob took the knife mechanically and nodded as he recognised it as his property. Evidently he had

dropped it during the rough-and-tumble fight with the man on the hill side.

It seemed beyond question that Marsden had found the spot, and yet, how explain the deserted house, the house where Meryl Sewell had told him she had stayed since she last saw him?

It seemed no sooner was one thread picked up than it snapped, and all which it had seemed possible to gain by following that line vanished into thin air.

"Well, that house was occupied this morning," Bob went on as he turned the thing over in his mind. "Why, man, I saw the place myself! I walked there with the two men while they got the rope that I tied the one up with."

"While they got the rope!" Marsden repeated, a smile stealing over his lips—a thin smile, hardly noticeable. "Explain yourself?"

Bob went back slowly over the whole night, reciting now in careful detail everything that had transpired. The wild chase through the woods with Gale Sewell, the meeting with Meryl, then to his experience with the two men, while the lawyer stood silently before him, head slightly bowed, eyelids down, listening attentively to the whole.

As he finished, Marsden threw back his head and a deep-drawn breath escaped him.

"Can you explain it?"

"The man—the second one—found the fellow tied up. Together they hustled back to the house, suspect-

ing we'd come down on them, cleared the place up and away they went."

"I suppose so," the lawyer agreed reluctantly. "I suppose so. Yet I looked the house over—I got in through a side window and went all over the place, barn too, and it didn't seem to me—dusty everywhere—that anyone could have been living in that shanty within a year, let alone that very day."

"Well, by God, they were!" Bob exclaimed. "And what's more, I'll find out who before I let up on this thing!"

"Well, we've the girl," Marsden put in suddenly.

The younger man turned and looked the lawyer over sharply.

"Yes, and what do you think of her?"

For a moment Marsden considered the question before he turned and flung himself into another chair. A deep sigh escaped his lips.

"I think she's the medicine Sewell needs, whoever she is. She's been with him all afternoon, and he seems like a different man. He just lay there looking at her and seemed content."

"Yes, I know," Bob agreed. "But who is she and how are we to find out?"

The lawyer shook his head.

"Have you talked with Kendon?" Bob demanded.

"Yes, a little. His story is clear enough, and it certainly seems to point to her being Gale Sewell's niece."

"She can be no one else."

"I hope so," Marsden agreed, again taking the floor and pacing slowly up and down, "I hope so, but we must be sure."

"For her sake as much as for his," Bob suggested.

"Er—yes." Marsden stopped with pursed lips. "Assuredly for her sake as much as for his, unless she is *not* his niece, and knows it."

"You say that!" Bob exclaimed. "You say that, and have seen her?"

"I say that"—the lawyer's tone grew cold, sharp and metallic—"because I'm Gale Sewell's attorney, and, hurt whom it may, I must do what I am here to do."

"True! true!" Bob agreed, and again he brushed back the hair from his high forehead as if he would be glad to clear the troubled thoughts as easily as the passing of his hand across his brow.

"Mr. Sewell will be better in a few days," Marsden went on, "and then I can question him carefully on the whole matter. You and I must get Kendon's story, between us, and then, with that information, we must go still further."

"You mean a sharp search for these people who must have occupied the house?"

"Oh, as to that, I've a couple of men hid in the woods. If anyone comes back we'll know of it."

"But an inquiry can be made?"

"We've got to move very carefully," Marsden reminded the other again. "Still, I have someone out after information on that score. If these people came

there and stayed, they must have secured food somewhere, so we'll surely get a trace of them yet."

"If I had held onto one of those two men, we'd have the facts now."

"We'll get at the bottom before we know it. A talk with Mr. Sewell and Kendon—and, by the way, Jack is coming home!"

"Jack coming home!" Bob exclaimed, with a thrill of delight at the unexpected information.

"Yes. I cabled him. We must use only people we can trust."

"And you've brought me into all this!"

"No." Marsden let the smile break out this time unrestrained, though there seemed to be no mirth in it. "You brought yourself into it and are keeping there all the time. Every new trick seems to come from your hand."

"When does Jack leave?"

"I cabled him two days ago. He should be here in a week."

"But will there be any need of him, that is, for this thing?" Bob suggested. "Can't we sift it to the bottom before then?"

"It doesn't seem to clear any the further on we go."

"No; yet we have Miss Sewell."

"Yes," Marsden agreed with a nod, "we have." He turned, passed down the room and came back to stop before the other again. "And she can help us a whole lot, if she will talk."

"I'm sure she will tell you all that she knows."

"Tell me?" Marsden shook his head. "No, tell you!"

"I don't follow," Bob looked up quickly.

"I mean—tell you. Doesn't she think a good deal of the man that rescued her from Wolfboro and fought for her on the mountains? She seems to, at least. You must take advantage of that and get her to talk. She must tell you everything—understand. Not about her three days up on the Larmer road, but before. At this convent. Little scraps of information. If she's playing the game, that's the way to find it out, and you——"

But Bob was on his feet, his eyes blazing. He stood full six feet and over, square shouldered, towering down upon Marsden. At the instant he gained his feet he could have struck out without thinking.

"You can cancel my retainer, Mr. Marsden."

"Why?" the lawyer gave back, his eyes narrowing. "Didn't you say yourself that the truth must be reached, for *her* sake as well as for his? Go ahead on the basis she is no party to the trick; go ahead on any basis you wish to, but get the facts. It won't do for her to try and take Gale Sewell's inheritance unless she can prove her claim. If she is not his niece, but in league with these people, we must know it, winning face or no. If she is not his niece, but an innocent cat's-paw, wouldn't she want to know it? Wouldn't you want her to know it? What more could you do to help her than to get at the facts?"

Bob brushed back his tumbled hair slowly.

"Yes." He nodded, for the argument was sound. "Yes."

"And," Marsden drove his point home, "if she is his niece we must prove it. To do that, all facts, all points—you can get them from her if you go at it in the right way."

"You mean?" Bob questioned slowly.

With a gesture, half of disgust, Marsden turned away.

"Win her confidence, win her. Man, get the information. Why should I tell you how?"

"You mean for me to play upon whatever feeling of gratefulness she may have?"

"I mean, get the facts—find out what she can tell you."

"You mean," Bob flared up again, "for me to play upon her feelings—to quiz and question her——"

"For her sake."

"For her sake!" Bob repeated slowly, as he studied the lawyer's face sharply. "For her sake!" he nodded again. "Yes, I suppose I must." And his feeling of resentment at the other's suggestion died down, though, in truth, he liked the idea not at all.

CHAPTER XV

OPTIMISTIC LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

THE morning sun broke through the early mists that invariably wreathe the tops of the Ossipees, lighting two rooms, at least, in Wilderness Lodge, where high elation held forth.

Meryl Sewell was the first of the two up, for as the dawn began to purple the east her eyes had opened to a survey of the long rambling room that was now her own.

At first she lay half awake, half asleep, in that delightful state when the world is very, very rosy, unless you've eaten what you shouldn't.

But as no discordant ingredients had been served to the newcomer at Wilderness Lodge, she rested, just seemingly conscious that she was at her uncle's at last —at some place she could call home.

She had never had such a place, she had never dreamed she would, though she had dreamed time and time again that she would like to, until Kendon came for her. Since then she had planned with beating heart and the glad joy of a woman's love for a home of her own, no matter how small, no matter how humble, so long as it was hers to do with and manage.

Now it was a reality—she was at home. There was an uncle to attend to,—a dear, grizzly bear of an uncle, —who would need her daily—and the house: she loved to tidy and put to rights. A button was off her uncle's coat—she had noticed it, and that must be sewed on first thing. Oh, and a cobweb in the hall! That must be attended to, while a hunt for others would be instituted. In the library the books had looked dusty. It would not take her very long to go over them, even if the room was the largest one she had ever seen in all her life.

And too—but why enumerate—there was so much. Flowers to fix: every vase must hold blossoms, for she was sure her uncle loved flowers, and—but she began to slip from that delightful "state" toward positive wakefulness, and the pink tint in the sky grew brighter.

Then over her rushed a sudden fear, that perhaps this uncle of hers who had lived so long alone would not want a prying niece to upset his household running in well-rounded ruts of years.

Oh, but that was too terrible to be possible, she agreed as soon as she had thought of it, and yet a little dampened in her enthusiasm, but still full of great schemes and high hopes, she dressed hurriedly and started on an early exploring expedition to see what wonders the outdoors held.

And just as Meryl Sewell sallied forth, Bob Hernald turned over onto his left wrist and woke up.

Even the suddenness of the awaking failed to drive

away the optimistic clouds sleep had tumbled over him. The world looked brighter this day—and why not? She was safe! Too, the gist of his dreams had been a speedy solution of all the mystery of the last few days.

That it had been easy to solve the riddles during the night made it not one whit the less possible in daylight.

Of course, there was the knowledge that the explanation of his dreams was inconsistent, as all such explanations are, and yet, the mere fact that the explanation had come—no matter in what shape—left the waking impression of optimism far stronger than it could possibly have been the night before.

In short, he began a hurried toilet, certain that all things would come right and that speedily, as though the Book of What Is To Be had opened to the writing on the page.

In this mood he followed the winding hallways from his room to the main one, and passed down the wide staircase that flanked the huge stone fireplace to the lower floor.

There he paused an instant before passing out to the wide veranda at the front. The porch led about the house, and he turned to the right. From the middle, steps led down to the wide sweep of lawn. There the turf under the trees was damp with the morning dew, while overhead the huge oaks spread their branches, gracefully canopying the lawn.

The air was cool, and on it came the morning fragrance of damp flowers. He took his way slowly across

the grass with no set idea of just where he might wander, but wholly decided on making an inspection of a part of the grounds at least.

As far as the eye could see the lawn led away to the right and left and straight ahead under the trees.

He walked on, and after a while came to where the ground fell away, and down before lay the whole valley, in which the lake could be seen, spread out in all its morning grandeur.

"Always perfect—never the same." He spoke aloud, thinking of the conversation the night before when he and Bashton had viewed the same picture in an entirely different setting.

And then as he stood studying the panorama he became conscious of someone else further along, under the trees to his right.

At first he caught only the glimpse of a light skirt. He watched for an instant. Who could this tall, daintily dressed lady be? And then he knew, and his heart leaped as he recognised her as she moved toward him.

In some way it seemed strange, and yet who else was there at Wilderness Lodge to be travelling about so early dressed so gaily.

The gown was white. One just from the convent should not have such wonderful garments, he began to speculate. Then he stopped, content to know it was she, and so perfectly arrayed, too.

A bit of a connoisseur was Bob Hernald, and the inevitable fitness of dress for femininity was one of the

demands his taste required to be satisfied. Here was satisfaction, if ever he had found it.

She came to him across the damp grass, her skirts lifted daintily, her greeting a smile as rare as ever was offered man. And he realised as she came forward, her skirts held only out of reach of the short blades, that she would do all things right. There are some such in the world, and meeting them one realises their versatility at once. So in this case. He really met her for the first time that morning, and meeting her recognised her art.

"Oh!" she cried like a glad creature of the mystic wood, "is it not beautiful? My first day—my first morning at home." On the word she hesitated just a bit, and the old well-remembered flush flew to her cheeks. "Is it not an auspicious introduction?"

"It is an eminently fitting greeting," he laughed gaily, remembering his optimistic dream. Then he caught a sudden shaft of light through the trees as it made marvels of the deep red bronze in her hair.

"And the poor, poor wrist?" she demanded suddenly. "Ah, it is all bandaged."

"It is doing beautifully. Doctor Bashton fixed that."

"But you didn't come back last night," she suddenly charged. This neglect had been taken much to heart, with the resolve to accuse him on the first occasion.

"I was back, but they sent you off to bed, I believe, and, too, Mr. Marsden and I had to puzzle over some business."

"Yes," she agreed, the smile suddenly leaving her face as the dark eyes lifted in wide question to his. "You are to tell me of all that."

But he was in no mood to let the riddle of the past few days break in upon such a morning.

"First I must introduce you to our country. Come, can't we find a spot somewhere near by. Let me point out the world hereabouts. It's got some very good points."

"And may I have you for a guide? You know, I only really arrived in this world at Wolfboro,"—the laughing eyes had a touch of seriousness in them,— "and there you met me. You started me on my journey into the world, and now you must take up the task again. I'm terribly ignorant. I shall be awfully stupid I know at times, but will you be my instructor?"

He caught his breath. Just such a pointed speech might have been framed by the lips of a finished coquette, and yet from her—— He swore softly under his breath that Marsden should have suggested she might be an accomplished actress.

"I'll pilot as long as you want me," he agreed with great gravity, and then, as over her lips a smile broke out: "Let me start with the valley before us and old Winnepesaukee in its heart."

They found a jutting rock on the very edge of the slope. Below the ground fell away down the mountain side, and out over the tree tops they looked. Far to their right the valley led back to the circling mountains

that closed in green and towering, as if to shut out what lay beyond, while to the left it opened wide, and the distant gray horizon was its limit. Straight ahead, across the lake and the far stretching valley, they could view the distant mountain peaks, steel blue and wreathed in that far distant haze of an almost unlimited vista. Over all there seemed to be that touch of vividness that comes when the air is clear, life-giving, like clean cutting steel.

In the middle, cast like a broken dash of great giant splashes, lay the lake, seemingly a hundred sheets with the many islands breaking its surface.

"Shall I lecture, really?" he began; but she stopped him.

"Please," she cried, "just let me draw a big deep breath and keep very, very still. Is it foolish—should I accept it all just as it comes tumbling in upon me? I don't know just how to behave."

He filled his lungs deeply of the clear air. About them were the huge trees, weathered of storm and gala days, the silent landmarks of the years that had gone by. Come what would, come what had, they were natural. The lake below was cast as only running waters mould. No sign of man's hand was near—it was all wild, true, natural!

Could such a girl be moulded to the tune of lazy waltzes and low-voiced questions of secluded corners? Or, better, was not after all the very setting into which she was cast the fitting measure of her frame?

There could be but one answer to Marsden's question of the night before. She knew nothing. She was what she claimed to be.

The optimistic clouds rolled back again, and he turned to smile with her in her pleasure.

"Don't know how to behave?" he cried gaily. "Oh, behave like a breath of fresh, life-giving air, as blows over these old trees, year in and year out. Your uncle is a bear of the woods, so he'll bend to that mood like tempered steel."

"And you?"

"I?" he hesitated; "I?" he laughed. "Why, I don't count—I——" But he stopped again as he was about to tell her he was a rank outsider. She seemed to consider him as one in her new world, and he suddenly decided that he would be, if she so wished. He never even figured then that he would whether she wished it or not.

"Don't count?" she questioned a little puzzled; "I think you count a great deal."

He looked away. This perfect frankness, an art he was unaccustomed to, left him dumb.

He could talk with the women of the world he had always known, but with this girl, the very freedom in her words seemed to take the answer from his lips.

He laughed guiltily, like an awakened bumpkin he felt himself, and poked the sandy soil with the heel of his boot.

Then she fell to telling him of her dream. Of how

she would dust and work. "For I did, you know, in the convent," she explained. "I can now—I can do some few things."

"Some few things!" he repeated. "You can do anything!"

She looked at him in wonder. She didn't understand.

Then the inability to turn a remark faded before the feeling that he was really far away from her, that she belonged to another world, in which he seemed an utter stranger. She appeared in full-blown womanhood, unsullied, untouched by the world and its ways, and came to meet satiated mortals.

As cool air after hot sultry days, she was a draught of nectar to parched lips. But could he drink?

It came as a passing cloud and sobered him an instant. He sat straight, suddenly moulded on new lines, seeing some things through new eyes—yet not really disbelieving his right to talk with her, to move by her side. He had no false notions of being too worldly, rather simply a determination to be less so in the future.

"Up here," he began slowly, with a deep indrawn breath, "one clears up like refined gold, you grow big—for it's a big country, and you want to do things, you want to be something. Perhaps it's just the air, and the vastness, for one feels that way always." And then he really spoke aloud, "But I feel more so now."

He, too, was growing innocent all of a sudden.

She clapped her hands.

"Then it must be the air to-day, for I feel just that way. There must be a special charm this morning."

"Yes, I *think* there is," he agreed, nodding gravely and looking at her as if she wasn't nearer than five thousand miles.

As they walked back under the huge oaks toward the house, a squirrel, an old gray fellow of some years, whisked by close at hand, and waited on the side of a big trunk for them to pass. He was quite unafraid, for even a squirrel knew neither had eyes for him.

CHAPTER XVI

GALE SEWELL MAKES REQUEST

BREAKFAST that morning was a quiet affair.

Marsden came to the table with a deep wrinkle across his forehead, and his stern, reticent manner seemed to throw a damper over Meryl Sewell. The shyness of her first meeting with Bob Hernald came to the surface in a flash, and hardly a word passed her lips during the meal.

She made some excuse as soon as she could and, hurrying from the room, left the two men alone.

Then, as the door closed upon the retreating servant, Marsden leaned forward, his elbows on the table. Without looking up he spoke:

"I've spent half the night at the thing and can't make any headway." He paused suddenly, shifted in his chair, turned the fork by his plate about slowly and looked up. "Shan't we leave the thing where it is—that is, accept her recovery as settling one score, only find out who she really is?"

"You mean, give up the search for those who carried her off?" Bob questioned slowly, as he weighed the suggestion.

"Yes. We have her."

"But suppose it is Kendon—suppose——" And then

he stopped suddenly as the thought came to him it was, after all, hardly his affair. Personally, he would have hunted down the ones responsible for such an act, but if the other, who knew the ins and outs of the matter—and at that instant the thought came to him that Marsden knew much more than he had mentioned,—decided it was not best to pursue the search further, there was nothing for him to do but bow to the inevitable.

"Well?"

"I was thinking that perhaps I'd better do no more than follow suggestions."

"Why?" The lawyer moved his chair back from the table and crossed his knees.

"Because my personal feelings have nothing to do with it. It is really Mr. Sewell's affair."

"But I don't want to bother him with the matter just now."

"But you must know what he would wish," Bob suggested, somewhat puzzled at the lawyer's manner and his appealing to him as to what course they should pursue.

"Well," Marsden began, taking the floor suddenly, "I won't bother Mr. Sewell for a week, at least. If we are going to follow up these fellows we must get at it at once. If we wait to consult him, it will be too late to do anything."

"Can he object to our going ahead?"

"Er—no—oh, I don't know. If there was a clear clew to know where we are going! I don't want to

plunge into something he wouldn't want me to meddle with."

"I see," Bob nodded.

"I don't know *all* the quirks in his affairs, and in this he has kept more to himself than usual. If he was in his right mind now——"

"Isn't he?"

"Wasn't he off his head?"

"Yes, but Doctor Bashton says he'll be himself in a day or so."

"I suppose so, yet I hate to bother him with the matter just now."

Bob studied the other in perplexity, little understanding his strange way of seemingly hesitating to accept any responsibility for their future course.

"You fear to go on and perhaps unearth some secret of Mr. Sewell's?"

"Yes."

"Is there such a danger?"

"Who can tell where our investigation might lead us?" the lawyer demanded, coming to a sudden stop.

"It isn't Mr. Sewell himself who had his niece carried off, is it?" Bob suddenly questioned, leaning forward, his elbows on his knees.

"Er—I should say no, of course!"

"Kendon?"

"His delight at her return would indicate not," Marsden admitted slowly.

"Or indicate that your theory that his accomplices carried her off was plausible," Bob added, even as in his own mind he rejected such a theory.

"In making sure of the girl's identity, wouldn't we settle that point?"

"Yes, I suppose we would," Bob admitted, "but while we were doing that these fellows could slip away."

"We would have Kendon."

"Do you really think Kendon is mixed up in it?" Bob questioned again.

Marsden turned to answer, when the door opened suddenly from the hall and Doctor Bashton stepped into the room.

"Mr. Sewell wishes to see you, sir."

"See me?" Bob questioned, rising quickly and turning from the doctor to Marsden. The physician had spoken to him.

"See Mr. Hernald?" Marsden demanded, stepping forward quickly. "What for?"

"I don't know. He simply asked to see Mr. Hernald."

"But is he able, Bashton?"

"He is stronger this morning. If you will simply see what he wants I think it will relieve his mind. He is very anxious to see you."

"You'd better go," Marsden agreed, speaking slowly. "But," he added, following Bob to the door, "don't touch on this matter."

"I shan't, unless he does."

"Wouldn't it be better, in his condition, to put him off—to tell him——"

"Didn't Kendon tell him what had happened?"

"Did he? Yes—then——"

"Then Kendon can hardly be mixed up in this," Bob finished quickly.

Marsden nodded slowly, and with a gesture of bewilderment, turned back toward the dining-room, while Bob mounted the stairs to the second floor.

At the door of the bedroom he knocked softly, and in an instant it was thrown open by Meryl Sewell.

"Come," she said, smiling her greeting at his surprised look, for he had not expected to find here there. "He is waiting," and then her voice lowered: "He is better, I think."

It was a large room, big and square, with furniture to match its vastness. Long windows let in the bright sunlight, and at the further side was a huge, canopied bed of massive mahogany, its four posts rising like carved masts bearing the white top.

The owner of Wilderness Lodge turned his head slowly, and a wan smile came to his lips at the sight of his companion of the night's ramble in the woods.

Bob Hernald moved slowly toward the bed, noticing as he did so that Meryl drew away quickly to the further end of the room, and when well out of earshot dropped into a huge chair by one of the windows.

"You sent for me?"

Gale Sewell nodded in answer, and at a chair close by the bed.

"I'm glad you are feeling better," Bob spoke cheerily, as he drew up the chair and dropped into it.

The pale face turned to the girl at the further end of the room and back once more to the other.

"I don't want to talk very much, Hernald—the doctor thought perhaps I'd better not see you at all, but I want to ask a few questions. Answer them, please,"—the voice grew stronger and a certain impetuous tone crept into the words,—"but don't go into detail. I must get well now,"—again the eyes travelled across the room—"that means rest, quiet. There, do you follow?"

"Precisely," Bob nodded.

"I know what happened to her," the owner of Wilderness Lodge went on again. "I have a hazy recollection of our night in the woods,—I will recall it later on,—but let me be clear on this: you brought her from Wolfboro?"

"Yes."

"She got away from you." Sewell spoke more to himself than to the other. "Then," he turned again, "you joined forces with Marsden—found her?"

Bob nodded, as this was put as a question.

"I must have gone off my head. You saw and followed me, found her and brought us both back here?"

Again Bob nodded.

"I see! I see!" Then quickly, "When did you get acquainted with Mr. Marsden?"

"Why, I never knew him very well," Bob replied, considerably surprised at the question. "I went to college with Jack Marsden, and so had met the father before. When I met Mr. Marsden the night we found Kendon——"

But a thin white hand was waven in protest.

"You went to college with Jack?"

"Yes."

"Know him pretty well?"

"We roomed together—played on the same team."

"Chums?"

"Yes."

"Where are you—— Oh, yes," Sewell answered for himself. "At the Hanover Club."

"Yes."

"What's your business?"

"I'm a lawyer—without practice."

Gale Sewell smiled grimly.

"Are you planning to stay up here much longer?"

"Yes and no," Bob answered. "I have no set plans."

"Can you stay up here for a month—say two?"

"Yes, I can."

"Well, will you?" The tone suddenly struck an impatient note.

"Why, yes," Bob agreed, considerably mystified by the question being put him. "If there's anything I

can do,—if that's what you mean,—I shall be only too glad to be of service."

Gale Sewell nodded quickly and turned away his head, as if weary already of the questioning.

At length, after a long pause, he turned slowly and eyed the other closely.

"Stay, then, if you will. Move over here from the Club."

"And do what?"

"Nothing—just move. In a couple of weeks at the very most, I'll be dead or better. I think,"—the smile was grim now—"I'll not be dead, so then I can talk. You move."

"I see," Bob agreed, rising, for the last had sounded like a final word. "I'll come at once." He hesitated, "And Mr. Marsden?"

"Well?"

"Nothing."

He saw that it would take endless explanation to go into his thoughts at all clearly. He hardly understood the need of him and Marsden, or why, if such an agreement was to be suggested, it had not come through the laywer, as had the original retainer.

For a moment he stood hesitating, turning over the oddness of the request and what it meant. But a few weeks would undoubtedly put the man before him into shape, and then a good deal—now nothing but puzzling facts—could be explained. A few weeks! But in the meantime? He put his thoughts into words.

"Shall we do anything in the other matter?"

"What matter?"

"Trying to locate the men who carried your niece away?"

"Trying to locate the men——" Gale Sewell half raised himself on his elbow and his eyes flashed suddenly. Then weakly he dropped back to the pillow as Bob stepped quickly to his side.

"Have you any idea?" he demanded, as with an effort, he caught his breath.

"We are both at sea."

"We?"

"Mr. Marsden and I."

"Oh!" Again the head turned weakly. "Can you find them?"

"They were keeping her at the farmhouse on the Larmer road. We know that, and also, we have the team. If we set the police after them, or get some detectives from Boston, a careful scouring of the country certainly ought to locate them."

The gray head was shaken uneasily. "I'll talk to Marsden. Move over here, be in the house, and"—a faded smile, half weary, half pathetic, crossed the white lips—"cheer her up. Just—just keep your eyes open—something might happen—and make her happy." He beckoned with the frail hand that lay like a shadowy ghost on the spread. "She's been out of the world all her life." He went on as Bob leaned over the bed: "This isn't much of a change for her up here, and the

first days will be the hardest. When I get around then we can plan, but until then"—the frail fingers touched the strong brown hand of the other, a little, pathetic, helpless touch, as the eyes met those of the younger man—"I leave it to you. You've done a lot—do this, look out for her!"

A faint mist seemed to blur Bob Hernald's eyes, for the man before him seemed no more than a shadow of the grave, who, with his last waning breath, thought first of the child now in his care.

Then as he swallowed the lump in his throat he nodded, and Gale Sewell caught a low spoken, but very decided: "I will!" as he turned away.

Tiptoeing back to the door he let himself out to the wide hall.

He was to care for her. That was why the owner of Wilderness Lodge had sent for him. A glad elation gripped him, for Gale Sewell had not only said *they* would care for her when he was up; but had for the present placed her in his charge.

Now he had naught to do but try and make the world, this new world to her, as merry, as pleasant, as joyous as he knew how.

CHAPTER XVII

OVER THE TEA TABLE

THE next two weeks slipped by—days uneventful in their happenings compared with the previous ones, yet full of satisfaction to Bob Hernald at least.

He was installed at Wilderness Lodge, bag and baggage, and according to its owner, and later confirmed by Marsden, he had nothing to do but entertain the new mistress of the rambling pile.

"And we're to drop all search for these fellows," Marsden added. "Why he wants it done, I can't say. But that is practically Mr. Sewell's instruction."

"He gave me to understand as much," Bob agreed. "I suppose he's content to have her safe, unwilling to stir the muddy waters again or bring publicity to the incident."

"But he will have to," the lawyer argued, "when he realises that there is a deeper significance in the matter than simply her abduction for a few days."

"You mean?"

"When he gets stronger he'll want to know *why* she should be carried off as well as we do. I know him. Now he's ill, and when that way he'll let nothing bother him,—but once well, I tell you he'll dip into the thing, and then——" Marsden drummed impatiently on the tea table as he paused.

"Well, and then?"

"This question of the girl's identity will come up. That has got to be settled."

"Confound it, man," Bob protested, "she can't be any one but——"

"Don't say she *can't*," Marsden jerked out; "say we hope she can't. Remember, everything is possible."

"Well, then, let's find out," Bob urged. "Let's get at it!"

For a moment Marsden sat hesitating, leaning forward in his chair,—they were sitting under the trees where below a perfect tennis court was netted in,—and then rising hastily he paced up and down the turf.

The other watched him half patiently, half angrily. The lawyer never seemed able to discuss the thing quietly, but was instantly on his feet the moment the subject was broached. Besides, this constant reference to the possibility of the girl being anyone but Gale Sewell's niece grew more and more annoying every time it was brought up, and the lawyer seemed continually referring to it as if no other thought occupied his mind.

Personally, he was satisfied, absolutely, as to Meryl's identity. Even the thought that she might be innocently playing a part he had put aside. Then why must Marsden keep harping upon such a disagreeable idea, If Jack would only come, he could quickly convince his father. He would see her, talk with her, learn to know her, a thing Marsden seemed to avoid doing.

In fact, as Marsden paced up and down and Bob

Hernald turned the question and pondered over it, his anger rose with each minute.

He would settle the thing once and for all. Marsden should at least learn his state of mind and never again would he bring the subject up for needless discussion. Talking of the thing brought no solution. Either they must actually do something, or drop the subject.

The lawyer turned and came back across the lawn.

"I could go to Ireland. Kendon has told me the name of the convent, and a quiet investigation there will settle the thing."

Bob Hernald dropped back into his chair with a feeling of relief. Then it was settled, and Marsden would get out. Bob really saw that he would be glad to have him go—and, too, the question would be taken up once and for all in a way that would give them some definite information.

"Well, what do you think?"

Bob glanced up suddenly, realising that the lawyer was standing waiting for an answer.

"Go, by all means. I don't see why we haven't thought of it before. You can certainly find out there—find out that she is Gale Sewell's niece."

Marsden turned with a gesture of impatience at the added words.

"I've thought of it before,"—he turned back,—"but what to tell Sewell? He mustn't know our suspicions, for if they are not well founded——"

"As they are not——"

"He must not know," Marsden finished with a scowl at the interruption.

"No, he must not," Bob agreed.

"I must make some excuse," the other went on, speaking half to himself. "Well, I can," nodding slowly. "Business in New York and the South—there are certain interests I can use." And then turning to Bob: "You and Jack—Jack will be here—you two can keep him satisfied. Three weeks—four at the most—and I shall be back."

"He'll be around inside of a day or two, Bashton says," Bob suggested; "but he may not ask questions for a while, so if you satisfy him as to the reason for your leaving, Jack and I can handle matters. I will stay here."

"I suppose you will," Marsden agreed absently. "I must see Jack. I can catch him in New York when he lands, Thursday."

"And sail Saturday?" Bob questioned.

"And sail Saturday."

Marsden turned away, studying the spreading vista under the trees for a long moment.

"I'll fix some things up," he remarked, and with a nod turned toward the house.

Bob watched him walk slowly across the grass, a decided feeling of relief his at the lawyer's sudden decision to actually do something toward a settlement of the question. He felt more and more that there could be no doubt as to whom Meryl really was, and yet to

know positively would be a decided relief. It could make no difference to him what Marsden found, for certainly in his own heart she, who had come to him with such pretty embarrassment there in Wolfboro, could hold no less place.

He drummed lightly on the table, and with half shut eyes, considered. Marsden was going away. Good. No more time to be given to him. Jack was returning. Good—yet not such a great thing. And then he smiled, smiled at himself, for he confessed his own guilt—it mattered little who came and went so long as she remained.

The flash of a white dress on the wide open porch at the right of the house caught his eye.

"Halloa!" he called.

She heard, and bending down glanced under the trees.

"In a moment," she answered, and turning, gave some directions to a waiting servant. Then with a quick step she came across the lawn.

"Uncle is asleep," she explained, "and I'm going to take a half-hour off. I've ordered tea. Can you stand it?"

"And some of those dainty cakes?"

"Yes; currant cakes."

A maid came toward them—servants had been found, and the household of Wilderness Lodge was decidedly changed—bearing a tray with its accompanying tea things.

"One lump of sugar," she declared, fixing his cup.

"See, I've been very observing? I know what you take."

"Yes," he nodded, "you have caught on quickly."

"Caught on?"

"You didn't provide that I should educate you in modern slang, did you?" he laughed.

"No," she smiled back, handing him his cup, "but you did agree to tell me something—and you haven't."

"What?" he demanded with mock seriousness. "What am I guilty of withholding from you?"

"It has been two whole weeks," she went on, looking out across the lawn, "and I have learned nothing more of our meeting so strangely on the road that morning."

He had expected this before; in fact, he had seen it coming more than once, and each time deftly sidestepped the issue. He dreaded to speak with her on the subject, fearing he would say too much or, withholding facts for her peace of mind, make her gravely suspicious.

"Oh, of our meeting on the road, where you were picking blackberries that stained those little fingers so red, and you made a sling for my poor arm. Remember how ruthlessly you sacrificed your sunbonnet? But it was a good omen." He held up the left hand, now quite strong. "It got well quickly."

"Yes," she agreed, seemingly led astray from the point. "Doesn't it pain you at all now?"

"Not a bit," he answered, feeling the ice growing stronger under his feet. "In fact," he laughed gaily, "I believe I could stand tennis," pointing to the court.

"You wanted to learn, you know. Let's be gourmands and bolt our tea, then we can try a game."

"We might." She was watching him intently, and yet he didn't suspect. He actually rated her in some things as a child—he thought he could lead always.

"While we devour the morsels we'll go over the points. Now you see," he rattled on, "when only two play the alleys there aren't used, so you have to place the ball within the inside lines to have it in. You serve from the back lines over there," pointing, "and you must get the ball into that square in front of the service line——" But she wasn't paying the least attention, and he saw it. Her eyes were following the vista under the great oaks.

As he stopped she turned her head and looked at him calmly.

"Are you quite fair to me, Mr. Hernald?"

"Quite fair," he echoed; but he knew the wind was out of his sails.

"You always treat me in just this way."

"Treat you! Oh, come," he tried to laugh it away. "You aren't fair now to me."

"Oh, I don't mean," she cried, leaning forward, as the colour mounted to her cheeks, so fearful she was of being misunderstood. "I don't mean that. You've done everything; you've been so kind—giving up all your time to me because uncle asked it. He says it's all right, but I know it's hard for you to come here from your club and live so quietly, and—and——"

"My dear Miss Sewell," he protested, determined to put her right on one point at least, "you are quite wrong. It is not hard to stay here. I have nothing to do in the whole world; in fact, I'm a very lazy mortal. When you know the world and its people a bit better you'll learn there's a stratum that's of little real account. We love to idle, and that's what I'm doing here, and with great relish. You know," he hurried on, "there's a saying of English people that they're like beer—the dregs on the bottom, the froth on the top, and the middle, that's sound; and if it wasn't for the middle class England wouldn't be anywhere. Well, over here I suppose we have the three elements, and it's the middle that holds us solid. Yet there's another class, at least I like to think so, for sometimes, when I become a bit vivisectingly inclined and try to place myself, I get into that other class."

"Yes?" She was interested. Her elbows were on the table, her hands locked and her chin—a daintily cut bit with a squareness that spoke of strength—cradled on them.

"That class," he leaned forward, elbows on knees, looking out under the trees and speaking earnestly, as he had so often, to himself, in the stillness of the night when alone with the great wide valley he loved—"is an idle class. We who move in it are rich,—richer than we need to be,—but we are ambitious to do great things. Yet instead of doing them or making a name, we let

our energy go spent on dressing well, riding, shooting, dancing—on being a good fellow, on having smart traps, good cars; on knowing a lot of everything that don't count. So we idle at our pleasure, when we will, as fancy strikes us. We are content a while at one thing, and then we stray. I'm content here," he finished, "so it's no great thing, my stopping a day at Wilderness Lodge."

"But why, then, aren't you of the froth?" She *was* interested.

He had glanced up with a smile on his lips as he finished, but now, at her question, he turned back to looked away under the trees.

"Because, froth is only froth, but with us—with us of this fourth class—there's the ambition."

"Even froth has its ambition to bubble," she suggested, too intent to realise she was hitting hard.

"But it can only bubble," he urged; "and those who can only do that never get into this class of ours. Of course," he agreed, "lots of us don't do any more than bubble; yet we could. We live on the standard of froth, then suddenly one of us is really stirred and what's in him comes out. He develops instantly because *it's* there—he does something. It mayn't be much—perhaps a kid in the street and a bolting horse; he stops the horse. A drunken brute raising hell,"—the word slipped out, for he was talking as he had so many times to the silent valley—"and he nabs him quickly or

knocks him down. A fire, we'll say, and he cuts in and pulls the people out, or helps. If he was *only* froth he wouldn't do any of these things. If he was the dregs"—he shook his head—"if he was in the middle class—why, really he'd be too busy with his own affairs to have time. Let us get into a good big war some day, and half the fellows that hang in the clubs, drive cars, that do nothing apparently volitionless, would be leaders of forlorn hopes. You'd find *them* the first men down in the enemy's trenches, and when the colours needed a steady hand to see it through"—he raised his head quickly, square chin up, eyes flashing—"they'd be on deck." A pause. "When there isn't any need, we loaf, apparently ambitionless, but we can, you know, if we have to."

For a moment she was silent. Then with a deep drawn breath.

"What stirs those of your class? You put yourself in it."

"Yes," nodding slowly, "oh, it's hard to say. I put myself in it," he explained, "because it tickles my vanity to think what I would do if the need came. I'm an idler, a—well, you see, I'm saying a lot I've only thought before, and so it's a bit jumbled—but I *am* an idler, and an idler always likes to *think* he could do something if he had to—if the cause stirred him. *Think?*" he questioned with a pause. "I guess we are froth after all."

"Oh, no, no, no!" she protested. "There is the

fourth class—and," she looked up to meet his eyes, "when you're stirred, do you become the leaders of the middle class?"

"That's a good idea—yes, I guess we would, for really the middle class are a lot of theorists—rushers after the almighty dollar, narrow accordingly; but we, when we break into life we're fresh, ready to lead, for we've resting for the time. I dare say we wouldn't last long, but then all big men are short lived."

"But when you burn you burn brightly!"

"When we do something we do it—no halfway measures." And then he stopped. "I guess that fourth class is the class of egoists."

"Why?"

"I've proven it to you." He spread out his hands as he rose to look down into her eyes.

"You have proven to me by your words that there is such a class, by your acts that those in it can be stirred."

"By my acts?"

"By your care of my uncle and myself. You rescued us, fought for us,—you were hurt, tired, sleepless,—but you fought, and only knew how to stop when you had won."

He shook his head slowly, studying her eyes deeply.

"Why did you fight?"

It came softly, the question. He saw that he was back again at the start, yet he thought no longer of fencing, for as he had talked he had forgotten that that was why he had begun.

The eyes that looked into his were deeply earnest—strong purpose there. Why should she not be told that little which he knew. It was her right.

Why had he fought? The question pounding upon his brain suddenly found a different answer. Across the table he would lean and as he looked deeply into her eyes, face close to face, he would tell her the truth—that he had fought for her because he——

"If I have put you off," he spoke slowly, "it has been because I thought it was best. Don't be surprised, for it's not really so much—but to-morrow. Let me sleep, dream on it. We'll talk to-morrow."

For a moment she studied his face, and then her hand flew out impetuously to him across the tea table.

"I asked you to guide me, and I'll follow your way. Come! *Now* I'll listen to the mysteries of tennis."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RIDDLE AGAIN

THE distant rumble of the thunder died away, growing fainter and fainter with each resounding peal.

The rain had ceased, yet the heavy clouds hung low, shutting out the moon and making the blackness about Wilderness Lodge seem deeper, more mysterious—possibly lurking with straggling sprites, cousins of the Catskill gnomes, who drank and caroused so boisterously with grey-bearded Rip Van Winkle.

The house itself was still, a dark, huddling mass of gray stone, and except in the library no light shone from the front.

Across a patch of trees to the right, however, a shaft of brightness fell from an upper window, and from the front porch, where he had but gone from the quiet library, Bob Hernald watched the light, speculating on the one who had just left him.

She had gone to her room, bidding him good-night with the laughing reminder, a touch of seriousness in the words, that to-night he must decide what he would tell her in the morning.

Lighting a cigarette, he drew the smoke deep into his lungs, and dropping onto the porch rail, a wide, massive balustrade of stone, studied the dark, damp leaves of the trees as they glittered in the light from her window.

What should he tell her? That she had been carried off by some agent unknown to him, that her uncle's trip to Boston was a fabrication formed for the occasion by the ones who had held her at the farmhouse on the Larmer road?

But why needlessly excite her? Such a tale could do naught else. Naturally she would ask the reason for her abduction, and certainly he could not even hint that her parentage was in doubt. He didn't believe it, felt certain Marsden's trip would prove his belief, and so she must not have such a thought to worry over any more than Gale Sewell.

The light suddenly went out and the dark trees took on a blurred blackness.

He might tell her that the doctor had feared her coming would upset Gale Sewell, and so, on his own responsibility, had her taken to the farmhouse; that Bashton had said nothing to Mr. Marsden of his act; that *they* had feared something had happened her—knowing only that she was missing—and—— But would that hold water?

For a long moment he considered the tale woven on the spur of the moment. Kendon would not tell her she had been abducted, Bashton knew nothing, so could hardly speak of the occurrence at all, while Gale Sewell would undoubtedly keep quiet.

Such a tale *would* meet the needs of the occasion, and she undoubtedly would accept it as coming from him without question.

He could be practically truthful as to how Gale Sewell came to be on the mountain side. That part need not be altered from actual facts, except to make the delirium that set the man afoot but a desire to find his niece, whose whereabouts he had chanced to learn of through a remark dropped by the doctor when he thought his patient asleep.

Gale Sewell had slipped away—so he would weave the tale. Then he had met him and following, found it impossible to turn him back. The night outdoors when ill, a fall, the desire to find his niece; that would account for his condition as she first saw him.

It looked plausible, and he slipped from the rail, sending his cigarette flying into the darkness. For an instant he stood considering with satisfaction his scheme; one to content but not alarm her.

He nodded, half turned, and then the dark trees sprang ghost-like into life as the light in the upper window flashed suddenly.

What was it! He leaped forward, but it was gone. A flitting figure passing under the trees just in the path of the light as it flashed out. Seen an instant and then lost, for as the darkness was broken by the light the man—it was a man, of that he was certain—had ducked quickly, and with a leap gained the shadow beyond the light.

Kendon, perhaps! For some minutes he waited, and then as the light went out again he turned back toward the front door.

But the darkness appealed to him, and though it was well on to eleven, he passed the entrance and moved slowly along the wide porch.

Up and down he paced. His little fabrication woven, he put aside any thought of that, and instead—stirred by the stillness of the night—considered his classification of himself that afternoon.

Often before had he on just such a night as this, with the stillness of the quiet woods about him, the damp, clean odours of the night in his nostrils, considered himself and the life he had led.

Practically ambitionless. So he had told himself time and time again.

Was there really a fourth class, and did *he* belong to it? Self-satisfaction surely argued that he did, and yet—oh, he dressed well, he liked to, as he liked to do all things that he did, well.

Why have clients? He did not need their fees, and surely their knotty problems would only tire him and limit his leisure, his ability to go and come as he would.

Froth! He himself had made the dividing line between the froth and the fourth class pretty indefinite. Anyone could be stirred, but now he saw that that alone was not enough.

Before, he had contented himself with the thought that the dormant willingness to do, *if* he cared to, placed him outside the brand of "idlers." Now, as he stopped and turned to gaze out to the black mass of damp hanging foliage, head up, chin square, eyes bright, he saw

through new eyes, his pupils dilated, for she had opened them.

The idle life he had been living! If such was the world, she would go back to the quiet gardens of the convent; she so full of a desire to do, a wish to help.

He saw where and how he had drifted on the placid waters of what others do. Now the wind was up, the sea running, the white-caps knocking their tops over to roll into the trough. Stirred indeed were the quiet waters, and by one who knew nothing of what he thought.

On rolled the long swell of the sea as the winds of ambition really blew, and he saw, felt, and knew it was the first time they had so moved. Indeed, if not before, he realised how much in so short a time she had become to him.

He stepped to the edge of the porch and looked up toward the leaden sky. His lungs filled deep with the air, cool, invigorating, and as his shoulders squared the cloud he saw lightened, moved aside and a patch of brightness was above him.

For a moment he watched. Again he filled his lungs deeply, and turned, ambition truly stirred, actually alive, eager, demanding of him satisfaction in deeds to meet the requirements of the new man within him—the new man that she had brought forth.

Again he took up his silent promenade, a smile on his lips. As he walked back and forth he hummed softly a swinging march.

Thus he tramped, taking no note of time until suddenly a step on the gravel drive caught his attention. He stopped in the shadow of a giant post and waited.

On came the footsteps, and then a shadowy figure moved toward the porch. It stopped like the figure he had caught sight of in the light under the trees, yet—it was close to twelve. Ah! Kendon.

The old servant came forward quickly, but stopped at a low cough to glance about.

"Halloa," Bob called, stepping out. "The rain has cleared the air."

Kendon came forward at the words.

"It's dark to-night, sir," he paused at the top step, "black as pitch under the trees."

"Yes. By the way, were you on the other side of the house a while back?"

"On the other side of here?" hesitating. "No. I just came through the woods." He motioned to the right.

"One of the gardeners, perhaps."

"What was it, sir? Someone about?" Kendon came close and his voice was nervously low.

"Oh, nothing. I thought I saw someone pass under the trees there a while back as I was sitting on the rail."

"It wasn't me, sir. You don't suppose——"

"Suppose! Suppose what?" He caught up the suggestion in the servant's words so suddenly that he was even startled himself.

"It might be those men?"

"What men?"

"The ones that carried Miss Sewell off; the ones that had me up on the mountain?"

"Why in Heaven's name should they come around here again?" Bob's tone plainly indicated his irritation at having the subject brought up again, and so unexpectedly too. Yet even as he spoke he was critically examining the old servant. Why should *he* fear these men would be coming back again? Was he after all in league with them, as Marsden had feared? Certainly it would seem he had some knowledge of their whereabouts to suggest, first thing, that a prowling stranger might be one of them.

In the quiet security of the last two weeks his suspicions of Kendon had passed away, especially so because of the decided change in the servant's manner.

Now, however, all his past misgivings flooded in afresh, and as Kendon avoided his direct gaze he spoke more sharply.

"Why should they come here again?"

"They might——"

"Might what?" he demanded with some anger when he had waited for the sentence to be completed. "Might try to carry Miss Sewell off again?"

"Oh, no, sir, not that," Kendon cried in genuine alarm at the mere suggestion. "Not that, but they might still try——"

"Still try what?" he urged sharply as the old servant

again hesitated. "If you would only be a bit franker, one might understand you." He failed to analyse his rising anger, but only construed the servant's words to mean that he did have some knowledge of these men. He seemed positive they would not try to carry off Meryl Sewell; then why their presence? Some connection there must be with Kendon. It suddenly looked as if Marsden was right.

"Have you any idea who these men are?" he finally demanded, when the one before him simply stood silent, as reticent apparently as the day he had been found in the old bunk-house.

Kendon looked up frankly.

"I have no idea, sir—not the least bit. The men who carried me off kept their faces covered, and I didn't, of course, see the two up on the Larmer road. Yet, from your description, they might be the same ones—and, too, the man we saw in the library that night could have been one of them."

"Didn't you see the ones who carried you off at all?"

"Why, no, sir! You see, when I went down the road I found a carriage waiting. Its back wheel was off, lying in the dust. The horses stood quietly—no one was around. I went up to it, the curtains were drawn, and opened the door. The moment I did that a pistol was pushed in my face. The fellow inside the hack was masked, and before I could move another man grabbed me from behind."

Bob nodded. He had heard the same explanation before, but now it seemed to have the ring of a prepared story.

"But why didn't they go and get Miss Sewell then?" he demanded.

"One spoke of her,—don't you remember I told you? —and the other one said 'he' would tend to it."

"'He'!" Bob repeated, and then the sudden recollection came to him that they were not to try to locate the men. The temptation was strong to probe the matter farther, and yet there had been no hesitancy on Marsden's part in stating that Gale Sewell desired all further search stopped. Under such circumstances he naturally hesitated.

"Well, it's beyond me," he agreed; "but I guess you're wrong. They won't be coming back this way again."

"Unless——"

Bob turned sharply.

"Unless what, Kendon? Can't you speak up, man, and stop this cursed mysterious manner?"

"I would, sir, but—but—I can't!"

"Oh, very well," Bob agreed, and turned toward the door.

"You see,"—the voice was meek,—"even Mr. Sewell doesn't know about it."

Bob turned quickly, added suspicion suddenly leaping to his brain. Gale Sewell didn't know about it! Had that been a slip of the tongue, said to satisfy him,

but really a confession of the old servant's connection with the affair?

Why was he out so late at night? Was Marsden right after all? He went back quickly over past events. Kendon had practically considered him and Marsden enemies at first. Was that because he had started with Meryl from Wolfboro, and in the end she had not reached Wilderness Lodge? Did the servant at the start interpret that to mean they had found out his plan of bringing back a substitute? Marsden's theory seemed suddenly confirmed.

"Isn't it a little strange to know that there is a reason why midnight intruders might appear and not mention such a fact to Mr. Sewell?" Bob suggested from the doorway.

"Do you know of any cause?" came back the strange question, but in a tone, he failed to note, which clearly indicated the servant's desire for an affirmative answer.

"Do I? Well, hardly, and if I did, and was in your place, I think I'd inform the one who employed me."

"You don't understand!"

For an instant Bob stood puzzled, watching Kendon's stolid face. Then with supreme disgust, he turned and entered the dark hall.

Surely the man was a fool to talk so openly, if guilty, and yet—was his apparent innocence a cloak? Hardly, because there had been no real need of admitting there was *any* cause for these men to return.

Yet why his reticence? Why his refusal to be frank?

Slowly he mounted the stairs. Why had the thing come up again at all? He had thrust the riddle aside, and now, out of the hidden chamber of his brain, it came beating as insistently for a solution as before, yet with added suspicions of the old servant.

CHAPTER XIX

STRANGE PASSAGEWAYS

Some few hours later Bob Hernald awoke from dreams lined with none of the optimistic tinting of his first night at Wilderness Lodge.

He had tossed since going to bed, half-awake, puzzling over his talk with Kendon, then slipping a little further toward sleep his thoughts had become uneasy dreams full of strange misgivings. Then a light, shuffling, tapping sound came forcing its way into the jumble and with a start he sat up in bed as a step, slow and stealthy, passed his door.

Wakefulness comes quickly, and suspicion grows with a bound even when apparent cause is missing.

Hastily pulling on his trousers and thrusting his feet into a pair of low pumps, he hurried to the door and peered out.

Down the hall, it was a long hall, leading off to parts unknown, a dim light moved. For a moment he stared out through the half-open door, drew back hastily as the figure hesitated, and then shaking his thoughts from dreamland to reality, recognised Kendon as he turned and gazed down the hall toward him.

Why was the servant about at such an hour, or had all these jumbled dreams raced through his brain in a brief second?

Turning, he reached the bureau and pulled the top drawer open. His fingers touched the cold barrel of his revolver, and then his watch. Sounding the repeater he got the hour: three o'clock.

Three o'clock! What *was* Kendon doing about at such a time? Gale Sewell had told him to keep his eyes open. Marsden was away. His suspicion of the old servant simply needed this added confirmation. Slipping the revolver into his pocket he hurried back to the door.

The light was gone. Hesitating just an instant he stepped into the hall, closed the door softly after him, and taking the direction he had seen the stooping figure, hurried down the hall. Door after door was passed, and far away he could catch the faint outline of a window. He was travelling through a portion of the house with which he was unfamiliar, yet he knew the hall led straight ahead of him, apparently running the full length of one of the long wings. On he hurried, but before he had gone far a side hall turned to the left and down that a light moved dimly.

Quickly, but quietly, he shortened the distance between the light and himself, and then moving on tiptoe he followed, keeping close to the right wall.

The hall seemed unending, and then suddenly the light, with a slow jerking motion, dropped out of sight. Stepping forward quickly he came to the head of a flight of stairs, and paused. The light was gone, no footsteps could be heard below. With quick strides he

descended the narrow winding steps and turned back along the lower floor.

He kept as close as he dared to the one before him, but dreaded at any moment that the old servant might turn. There were no available niches or deep doorways into which he could dodge, and the fear of discovery grew more terrible each moment. He hardly dared breathe, he feared his steps would be heard and so he moved craftily, hoping to track the one before him unobserved and find out his purpose afoot at such an hour. There must be something sinister in the man's motive, the dark hallways, the night silences of a rambling house made the impression twofold strong.

Kendon kept on, the wax taper held before him lighting the doorways on his right; the windows on his left, closed with heavy shutters, in flitting shadows.

Then suddenly the servant stopped, and the next instant, as he waited close to the wall, he heard a key turn and the man and light passed out of sight. With a bound he covered the space and was listening at the door.

All was still! Then came shuffling steps as if the feet were searching for their foothold.

Cautiously he tried the knob and it turned. The next instant he stepped across the threshold and below him he could hear footsteps.

Groping his way along, he kept to the right wall and followed it around. The first corner was passed, then

along the other wall for perhaps fifteen feet he went to the second. Along that he groped his way until the dim outline of a rail was before him.

It went about an opening, and he peered down.

For an instant he hesitated, and then finding the first step, followed. They were steep, like a ladder, and the rail was a small iron one.

On he went, into pitchy blackness, and no light ahead. Reaching a landing he paused. Not a sound could be heard, except his own breathing, and no light was to be seen.

Groping out, he felt along the wall. By now his eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness and he could make out the dim outline of a narrow hall, perhaps four feet wide.

Turning toward the stairs, he moved slowly until he came to a wall across the hallway. Making sure there was no door he turned back and with his hand on the right wall hurried ahead. Twenty feet, perhaps, from the stairs, he came to a turn, and far away to the right the light could be seen.

With quick steps he closed up the distance, but only to see the light disappear again to the left.

"Another turn!" he muttered, and with long strides covered the distance to the corner, but the light was gone.

The impression that he was chasing a will-of-the-wisp came over him.

Why so many twisting ways and where could they

finally lead? Wide awake now, his curiosity at fever point, he hurried on to another turn.

Following the wall he came again upon an opening about another flight of stairs.

He found the head and down he went. The air was growing damp and heavy, and his hand in reaching out found the walls were of stone.

"The cellar," he muttered, half aloud, for some way the impression seized upon him that he was alone, or the one before him too elusive to be real.

A dozen steps brought him to a rough stone flagging, and far ahead was the stooping figure and the light.

They were in another hallway, wider and more open. Piles of lumber were about; boxes and barrels, and so, counting on these as places to hide behind, if the other should turn, he closed up the distance between them.

On through a perfect labyrinth of passage-ways and rooms he followed the dancing light, and finally hurrying through a doorway into a small room, he came upon the old servant not ten feet from him, working over a heavy door.

The lock jangled and with much protesting from rusty hinges the iron door swung open, and Kendon stepped into the black opening.

The chase was growing in interest and seemingly nearing its culmination. As the servant passed out of sight, Bob crossed the room quickly to the opening. A cold, damp draft blew full in his face.

It had been dark in the cellar proper, yet not as black as down the passage where Kendon had gone. Peering in, he made out the arched top and sides of a stone passage-way down which the light flickered and was gone.

With a glance at the iron door, he mounted the one step, and took up the trail again.

The right wall was again his guide, and with hurrying steps he pushed ahead until once again the faint glimmer of the light caught his eye.

There was no doubt the servant was travelling familiar ground, for at no time had he hesitated an instant.

But why the journey at such an hour, and to where did it lead? It seemed impossible to believe that they were still travelling through the cellar of the house. Possibly the way led to some out-building,—the stables, —and yet, even as such a thought came to him it seemed impossible, for the stables were, to his mind, too far from the house to be connected with it in such a manner.

On they went, and it seemed as if the way would never end. For a while the floor, made of huge flags, seemed to go downward, and then it was unquestionably an upward grade that they travelled.

Twice he stumbled over steps in the darkness, but they were no more than three each time, and again the level floor led on after going up them.

Thus he followed blindly till again came the question

of their destination. Already they had gone far enough to be halfway to the lake, at least that was the impression, and yet there seemed no end to the rock-built way.

No opening had been encountered so far on the right side, and while at first the way had turned, now it led on straight, black, unreal.

It might have been the never-ending way of dreams. The walls were damp; low arched was the ceiling where he caught glimpses of its gray curves in the dancing light of Kendon's taper.

Walking on tiptoes, as he had been since the start, the footsteps of the servant echoed back to him, sounding hollow, ghostly in the darkness.

The light cast the stooping figure fantastic in the extreme, and as the monotony of the long chase grew, it seemed as if it were some unreal, impossible creature that he was following.

Up two more steps he felt his way, and then as he glanced about, the light ahead was again lost.

Hurrying forward he caught it, high above him, and saw more steps leading upward. He began to mount. Up they went, step after step, then a level stretch no more than a landing, then more steps.

The air suddenly grew fresher and he realised that they must be above ground, or close to it.

Then the light was lost, and the steps began to wind as in a tower or turret. On up ahead the laboured breathing of Kendon could be heard, and then a loop-

hole in the wall was passed and through it a faint dim path of light. He paused to glance out. Heavy foliage and the skies above met his gaze.

A dozen steps more, and the stairs ended in a small square room. Kendon stood in the middle.

Hastily drawing behind the corner of the entrance Bob peered in. The servant stood hesitating—silent, as if listening. Then on tiptoe he moved across the floor and peered out through another doorway.

Thus the two stood, each silent, and then suddenly a step sounded above them—a foot moving on stone.

Like a flash Kendon turned, and with a cry like a mad bull, rushed across the room and disappeared.

With a leap Bob was after him, but before he could cross to the stairs a call came from above. Then a smothered oath, and then only deep intaking breaths and quick-moving feet.

With a leap he was up the stairs, to come to a sudden stop at the top, a hand on each door-jamb. A small room like that below met his bewildered gaze, while a dark lantern—its shutter turned on full—lighted the gray walls.

In the middle of the floor were three men—Kendon and two others, each striving to get at the other.

For an instant he watched the struggling figures, fascinated, and then, before he could call out, a pistol swung butt down, and like grass before the scythe the old servant crumpled into a heap.

Then he recognised them—the two men of the Larmer

road! With a wild oath he sprung at them, forgetting in his anger that he was armed.

A pistol flew up, roared a wild, blinding flash in his very eyes and a heavy blow fell on his head.

The light danced a hundred flashing blotches. He groped out blindly with clenched fists, found nothing, and dropped a limp heap on the stones.

CHAPTER XX

JOSEPH SEWELL'S LEGACY

A LOW groan, a wild thumping, a pain that seemed never to stop.

The thumping and pain were his, he knew, but the groan? It came again. The light was like early morning, but the walls—all stone.

The groan again—and then, dizzy and groggy, Bob Hernald sat up, his hand following the lines of a fairly well-developed lump in his hair, over the left temple.

The groan again! He turned—Kendon! The stone walls! Ah! Sharp as was the pain and as constant the singing in his ears, he began to gather the fragments of his senses together.

The men—the two of the Larmer road—the ones who had carried her off! He fumbled for his pistol as he staggered to his feet. The cold air from one of the windows filled his lungs, and he faced it as the prize-fighter, down and nearly gone, longs for the wet sponge and stinging towels.

Then he saw the faint tint in the east and remembered it was dark when he first came into the room. The men were well away by now.

The night's wild chase was beginning slowly to piece

itself together. Yet where was he? He turned as another groan sounded behind him. Kendon was coming around. He watched the twitching muscles an instant offering no help, but cuddled his aching head in his hands.

Kendon stirred again, and he peered at him through his fingers as the servant raised himself to his elbow, and, in turn, cuddled his head in his hands, half covering a deep cut, matted now with blood, in the white hair.

Then Bob dropped his hands to his sides wearily and looked the servant over. The recollection came that he had followed Kendon, suspicious of his midnight wanderings. If he had come out to be knocked in the head, it certainly did not look as if he was in league with those who maltreated him.

By now Kendon was regaining his wits—with a cry he staggered to his feet.

"The papers!"

"The papers!" Where had he heard that before? He watched the servant's frantic, haphazard search of the small room, and then he remembered. It had been "the papers" the men had been demanding at the deserted bunk house.

The old servant searched the whole room; then a niche in the wall, much like a small cupboard, and finally he came to a rocking stop before the other.

"How," he demanded, a hand held out to the wall for support, "how did you come here?"

Bob Hernald laughed, and there was some mirth in it.

"Sit down, Kendon," he advised. "I guess we've come to the point where a little more frankness is needed."

The servant stared, but sank to the stone seat indicated.

"I followed you—all the way from the house. But—let us start straight. Where are we?"

"In the tower."

"The tower? Wilderness Lodge has no tower."

"The one on the hill—the one that has never been finished."

"Oh," Bob Hernald muttered, and the exclamation was eloquent of his thoughts, for now he could understand the distance they had walked. "Well, I followed you because I was suspicious of you and I wanted to know what you were up to at such a time of night. I was right behind you when you stopped below here. I got to the door in time to see you go over; then I got the same medicine." He rubbed the spot reflectively. "Thought as I went down I was shot." He glanced up to the wall over the doorway. A black spot on the stones marked where the bullet had struck.

"Suspicious of me!" Kendon repeated.

"Yes," the other agreed somewhat tersely. "Your lack of frankness, your manner, both are somewhat bewildering at times."

Kendon's eyes sought the corners of the narrow room, then the niche in the wall. He rose slowly, looked

through the niche again, glanced about the room, lifted the stone that had covered the space, turned and sat down.

"Suspicious of me. Why, sir?"

"Because of your actions. Last night you seemed to think there was good cause why these men might return again. Such a feeling made me think you might be in league with them, might know something of their whereabouts."

"I see."

"Possibly I had no better grounds than you had in suspecting me before."

"I was wrong, sir, yet I can't see why you should think I was in league with these men. I only thought they might come back——"

"For what?" Bob demanded.

For an instant Kendon considered the question, and again his eyes travelled about the room.

"They're gone, sir," he began speaking slowly, "and so I—suppose—I—er—I suppose I can speak of it—I suppose I should."

"Speak of what, Kendon?" Bob encouraged him.

"Of Mr. Sewell's legacy, Mr. Joseph Sewell's—of the securities Mr. Joseph Sewell gave me."

"Securities Mr. Joseph Sewell, this Mr. Sewell's brother, gave you?"

"Yes. He told me to bring them back with me to America when I came to his brother. They were for me, unless Miss Meryl should return."

Bob Hernald sat up quickly, with the feeling that at last some light was to be thrown on matters.

"Yes," he suggested.

"He knew how his brother had once cared for his wife, and he left the money to me for Miss Meryl, if Mr. Gale Sewell ever found her. If not, it was to be mine."

"You mean," Bob questioned, "that you had some securities from Mr. Joseph Sewell to keep for his daughter if she was found?"

Kendon nodded.

"But what were they doing here? It was them—these bonds—the men got?"

"Yes. You see, sir, Mr. Joseph Sewell died in China. We were travelling, and we got to this little village. He hadn't been well for a long while, and there he grew worse and died. Before he passed away, he gave me an order on his bankers, in London, for these securities. He told me, sir, his brother was wealthy and didn't need the money at all—that it was mine, unless I should find his daughter, or Mr. Gale Sewell should. Then the bonds were to be given to her."

"And you just kept them, hoping Miss Sewell would be found?" Bob questioned.

"Yes. While we failed to find Miss Meryl at first, I had a feeling that we would some day. You see I was right."

"And no one knew of them?"

"I thought not. I kept them in a bank for a while,

but when we came up here I brought them, in a package, three packages they were in, and I put them here —hid them. I really thought they were safe."

"But suppose you never had found Miss Sewell?"

"I hadn't thought of that—I just kept them. They weren't really mine, if she ever was found, and I left a note telling where I had left them."

"But why didn't you tell Mr. Sewell about them?"

"His brother told me not to; in fact, he laid a great deal of emphasis on that. Why, I don't know. He said to say nothing to anyone, for they were mine if Miss Meryl was never found."

"I see," Bob nodded. "What did they amount to?"

"Three hundred and twenty thousand dollars."

"Three hundred and twenty thousand dollars!" Bob repeated. "You kept that sum in securities all this time, after you had searched for Miss Sewell and failed to find her? You left that money lying about in hopes she *might* turn up sometime?"

"I suppose it was careless."

"Careless!" Bob Hernald echoed, as he got up and crossed the room. "Careless!"

He had his answer as to Kendon's being connected in any way with Meryl Sewell's abduction.

CHAPTER XXI

MARSDEN DEPARTS

QUICKLY Bob Hernald put question after question to the old servant, who answered readily enough now. The game was deeper than Bob had dreamed of, and there was need for a clear outline of facts.

Yet Kendon's answers gave him little added light. There was no way, apparently, to explain how these men came to know of the bonds, or, moreover, how, having learned of their existence, they had found the hiding place.

"This note," he suggested, "telling where they were hidden—where is that?"

"In my desk in a small tin box."

"Is it there now?"

For a moment Kendon eyed the other, and then suddenly he saw the point and was on his feet.

"Come on!" Bob cried, starting for the stairs. "Look up that note and I'll go for Mr. Marsden."

Down the steps they hurried, to come to a sudden pause, on the landing. A package lay on the floor.

"Dropped in their rush to get away!" Bob declared, seizing upon the bundle.

"It's two of the packages!" Kendon cried, breaking the red cord with nervous fingers.

Quickly they searched the towers and stairs for the

third package, but to no avail. The outside stairs that led to the ground, and the way the two men must have left, were gone over, with a like result. Finally, as the sun shot above the heavens, they turned and made their way back through the long passage, as they had come.

Once in Kendon's room, a hasty search of the tin box brought forth a note addressed in the straggling hand of the old servant to "Miss Meryl Sewell, or Mr. Gale Sewell." It was sealed, yet on a careful examination the fact that it had been opened and resealed was apparent.

Cold water and court plaster were next demanded, and while they both bathed, and Bob repaired the cut on Kendon's head—a deep, ugly-looking wound, yet one to be covered up by a rebrushing of the hair—they discussed the whole affair.

"No one," Kendon reiterated, "knew that Mr. Joseph Sewell left me these bonds. You see they were mine as long as Miss Meryl was not found, and so I kept them here in my room. Then when we got word of her and I was to go to Europe to bring her home, I thought of the package—papers, I called them. Mr. Sewell said my rooms were to be repainted while I was away, and I was to move everything out of them. I didn't know what to do with the papers,—the bonds,—but one day, I had gone to the old tower to look over the country before I left, I noticed that loose stone. It seemed a good hiding place, and so I carred the package there. No one saw me, I am sure. They have been there ever since, but to-night, your speaking of seeing

some men about made me uneasy, especially since that day in the bunk house. The questions put to me there made me certain someone knew of the bonds. I had intended getting them before, but so much has happened since I got back, and, too, I thought it was a safe hiding place. But to-night, after I got to bed, I kept thinking of the package and at last decided to get it."

Bob nodded.

"That opened note shows how they discovered the hiding place—but not the manner in which they discovered the existence of the legacy."

"I can't understand that. When I left for Ireland I am certain no one knew that they were in existence; yet as soon as I landed in Wolfboro I was carried off, and by men who knew all about it. They were torturing me there in the bunk house to make me tell where the package was hid."

"The same men carried off Miss Sewell, who is the actual owner of the bonds."

"Yes."

"If she had returned after the hiding place of the bonds had been discovered—and they had been secured, —you possibly would have said nothing to her about them, and so the theft never would have been followed up."

"Oh, no, sir!" Kendon protested. "I would have told her, even if they were lost."

"Yes, I dare say you would, but these people didn't so reckon. To put it baldly, they found out about the

bonds while you were away, but not the hiding place. That note, telling where they were, where was it?"

"I had it with me,—it was in that box, in my trunk."

"Exactly. Well, they learned only of the existence of the bonds. When you returned with Miss Sewell they thought to wring from you the hiding place of the package. Meanwhile, they decided to keep Miss Sewell from her uncle; in fact, they managed to stop all messages concerning your return, so no one knew about it. Thus they could keep you two as long as was necessary to get the facts out of you and obtain the securities, and no one would be looking for either of you. By stopping the telegrams you sent, neither Mr. Sewell nor Mr. Marsden would have an idea you were in this country. When they had your secret, and thus the bonds, they would have let you go and returned Miss Sewell. You would find the bonds gone, and perhaps say nothing about them—the easiest way out of it. Yes," Bob nodded slowly, "in the rough, that's it."

"And you rescued me, sir, and found Miss Meryl, and but for you, sir,"—gratitude was written largely over the pale, lined face—"oh, sir, but for you——"

"Supposing you open those two packages and count your loss," Bob put in quickly. "Have you a list of the whole?"

From the tin box the servant produced a list of the securities, and the two went hurriedly over it, to find that after all the robbers had fared rather badly as to profits.

The loss was securities worth a little less than fifty thousand dollars—a good round sum, to be sure, but not so much in comparison to what it might have been.

"But for you, sir, following me, they would have got them all!" Kendon cried.

"Well, they didn't," Bob agreed somewhat curtly, for the folly of hiding securities of such an amount, in a half-built tower, and then leaving the address of the package where anyone could find it, was a bit annoying —coupled with a cracked head.

"And now, sir——"

"Is there a safe here anywhere?"

"Mr. Sewell has one, but only he knows the combination."

"Has Mr. Marsden got one in his house?"

"I can't say, sir, but I think so."

"Well, you take that package and trot over with it to him. Put it in his safe, if he has one. Oh, you needn't tell him what's in it unless you want to," he added, as Kendon's face grew suddenly long, "only I don't see why he shouldn't be told."

"Perhaps Miss Meryl wouldn't want anyone to know she had inherited such a sum of money."

Bob held out his hand for the two packages, and began running over the papers again. "Anyone can use them," he nodded, "anyone! Why did he do that?"

"He told me they were all payable to the holder; he did not say why he left them in that way."

Bob handed the package back.

"Go take them over to Mr. Marsden's and put them into his safe. Tell him I'll be over to see him, unless he's coming here. These men must be found—but you hurry. I'll follow as soon as I have breakfast."

Back again in his own room, Bob Hernald dressed quickly, took a pull at his flask—in lieu of a night's sleep—and hastened to the breakfast-room.

The two men had had plenty of time to get away by now, and so their capture did not depend upon immediate action. Too, before such action was to be taken, Marsden must be consulted; and perhaps Gale Sewell; but first, his own appetite.

As he sat finishing his coffee and idly tapping a cigarette upon the table, he "briefed" incidents.

The hiding place of the package was discovered through Kendon's senseless letter. In fact, it must have been found only the day before, or otherwise they would have acted sooner upon the information thus gained.

But how had the discovery been made that such a package of wealth existed? Joseph Sewell had given it into Kendon's keeping. Who else knew of it? Certainly he had not written to Gale Sewell, for according to Kendon the brother was not to know of its existence. A foolish condition, but one just then not worth puzzling over.

Yet had Gale Sewell been told? There was a letter between the brothers at the last,—Marsden had spoken of it,—a letter, the contents of which the lawyer knew

nothing. Did that letter tell of this package, and had someone read it? But who had access to Gale Sewell's personal papers? He shook his head. Yet, if that was the means by which the discovery had been made, it must have occurred between Kendon's start for Ireland and his return.

He shook his head, rose slowly to his feet, lighting his cigarette as he passed out on the wide veranda.

Across the lawn came Kendon, and under his arm was the same white package with which he had set out.

"He's gone, sir!" the old servant exclaimed as he came forward.

"Gone! Who? Mr. Marsden?"

"Yes. Hicks, sir, the butler, gave me this—he was going to bring it over." Kendon held out a note. "Mr. Marsden left early this morning for Wolfboro to catch that first train to Boston."

Bob tore open the note and read it hastily. It was no more than a line, speaking of urgent business that called the lawyer to New York at once, and explaining that he must leave to Bob Hernald the making of all necessary explanations to Mr. Sewell, as he should not return before going abroad.

"You can plead lack of all knowledge as to my plans," Marsden wrote, "except as explained here. I go to New York, perhaps South, to-morrow."

Bob Hernald turned to Kendon with knit brows. Some way this sudden departure seemed odd.

"Hicks said, sir, that early this morning, almost be-

fore daylight. a man called and Mr. Marsden went away at once."

"I see," Bob nodded.

Kendon held out the package.

"Why not give these to Miss Sewell at once," Bob suggested, eyeing the bundle with a feeling that in its contents there should be an explanation of all the puzzles.

"But, sir, I can't! I haven't all—and Mr. Sewell should be told first."

"And he's in no shape to be bothered just now. The chances of getting the balance back are pretty slim, Kendon."

"Can't we find the men—can't we get them back? They are hers!"

Suddenly a plan came to Bob Hernald as he stood there undecided.

"Perhaps," he agreed. "You don't want to give what you have left to Miss Sewell? No? Then put them somewhere, so there will be no danger of losing them again."

"But where, sir?"

"There's a safe over at the club, and if these fellows should upon discovering their failure at a complete haul, come back again, they'd never look there."

"Would you take them, sir? If—if you would."

"Yes, I'll take them. What time does that train leave Wolfboro?"

"Eight-forty-three."

"Well, tie them up, seal them carefully and give me a list of the missing securities. I'll put them in the safe over there, and, too, I'll try to catch Mr. Marsden before he leaves Wolfboro. Hurry!" he added, taking a look at his watch.

He followed Kendon into the house and through the dining-room.

In the hall he met Meryl Sewell coming down the stairs.

"So early?" she cried.

"I've stirred up a little more business," he explained, laughing. "I've got to run over to the club and then on to Wolfboro."

"To Wolfboro! In the car?"

He nooded, watching her eager face with a strange elation.

"Oh, if I——" And then she stopped, thinking suddenly of her uncle, and, too, that she should not suggest going when he had not asked her.

He eyed her merrily, knowing that the long ride would have an added pleasure if she was his companion.

"By all means!" he agreed. "Do come. Get your breakfast—risk indigestion for once by bolting it, for I must be off at once."

"But my uncle?" Yet her face spoke her eagerness to go.

"Kendon can explain, and we'll be back before noon. It will be a glorious day."

For an instant she hesitated, and then, agreement in

her eyes, the temptations of the trip were too strong, she hurried to get ready.

Kendon came with the papers, and he had time to write a brief note to Marsden, if by chance they should make Wolfboro only in time to catch the train.

He told him of the robbery, but made no mention of his plans, for those depended upon his finding Frank Hemming at the club and being able to press him into service.

Then she came, a long dainty cloak making her seem taller, a veil of silver gray framing her face, out of which dancing eyes met his, all alight for the ride before them.

He helped her in, gave Kendon a final word of explanation for Gale Sewell, in case he should ask for them, and then the car was away, full speed, for they had need to hurry.

CHAPTER XXII

A RUN AGAINST TIME

THE cool morning air fanned their faces while the actual need of speed added a spirit of excitement to the run.

Meryl Sewell asked no questions, content to go for sake of the trip; and, too, for the sake of being with Bob Hernald, for the quiet house seemed strangely lonely when he was away. Too, she had caught the sharp note in his voice and realised for some reason Wolfboro must be made in short order.

It was true he was going to act against orders. Gale Sewell had said the men guilty of her abduction were not to be followed up, yet, realising that, he held to the sudden resolve taken as he had talked with Kendon on the porch.

A new phase had come to the thing now in the theft of last night, and through it he saw a way of possibly securing the men guilty of the stolen bonds, they the ones guilty of her abduction, and also the recovery of the bonds themselves, and, to him more important than anything else, the solution of the mystery.

He had seen face to face the two men on the Larmer road—the one in the library he had also been able to get a good look at, and thus he had his description as

well—all of which satisfied him that they alone were not the instigators of her abduction. Perhaps he could find out, *if* he could get Hemming on to that eight-forty-three to Boston. Thus every minute counted, and so the car was pushed to its very highest speed.

He said little, a low word to her that they must hurry, as they sped down the drive; and then a close watch on the winding road, a concentration of mind on the plan he had half-formed, and a quick ear to the steady hum of the motor. Nothing must go wrong now; every ounce of power must be obtained.

Yet he was conscious of her there, leaning back, quiet as death, yet alive, pulsing, with quick eyes to note the road ahead, the speed they were making.

He glanced at the time, noted the point on the road and advanced the spark again.

Down the long hill they had come, over the sandy spots, around the curves where one had to brace himself, and he called a warning to her to hold tight.

Trees flew by, the whole a mad blur, and far away the valley and lake seemed only waiting for them to shoot out from the hanging road to land in its very midst.

It was wild driving, and when they were on the level where real speed could be made, he drew a deep breath, for the strain on his still weak wrist had been telling on his nerves.

Again an advance of the spark, the throttle opened just a bit more and the car seemed to feel the hand, to

know that the touch meant every ounce to the task, no matter if the pace might break its heart.

And so they raced to the turn off to the Hanover Club, and then as they swung into the wood-road the siren sent out its long call; once, twice, then once again and again.

"They'll know it," he cried, not slowing at all, even for the roughness of the road.

Here was where valuable time must be lost, and realising it, he longed for greater speed than had been made before.

Again the long call of the siren, and with a rush he brought the car to a stop.

"Wait!" he cried. "Get into the tonneau!"

He was on to the ground and running up the path.

"Frank Hemming! Frank Hemming!" he cried. There was a group on the porch.

"Frank!" someone else took up the cry, and then "Frank! Down at the pool."

"Get him—you, Tom," he yelled. "Fetch him quick." And he bolted up the stairs to seize upon a dress-suit case, into which he hastily threw every available bit of "city" clothing he could lay hands on; in part the property of the one for whom they were intended, other articles unoffered contributions from numerous members of the Club.

On the steps he found a crowd, ready with a thousand questions, but up the path from the pool came the negro cook, followed by Hemming, partly dressed.

"Fo' de Lord, Mistah Hemming, do come a-hurryin'. He done seem to need you powerful!"

"Well, what in hell," Hemming demanded, "are you——"

But that was as far as he got. Bob seized his coat, slapped a hat on to his friend's head—two sizes too large—and pulled him along.

"It's life and death, Frank. Come!" And to the disgust and expressively brief exclamations of the others, the two bolted down the path.

Frank Hemming knew not what lay before, but followed, satisfied that there was just cause for all this hurry if Bob Hernald led the way. At college his teammates had learned the wisdom of that faith, and so now, men who knew him believed likewise.

There was no time for introductions, but into the seat by his side he thrust his friend. Then a touch and twist of the wheel and they were back again toward the main road—into it—and off for Wolfboro. No more stops, if the motor held, while Meryl, cheeks aflame, eyes bright, braced herself in the spacious tonneau and recalled words spoken over the tea table. She nodded; there was a fourth class, and he? Her heart leaped—and around a curve they swung, then a long straight road ahead, and more speed.

Bob Hernald nodded sideways to his friend, and the latter leaned over. With one eye on the road ahead, his mouth closed to Hemming's ear, be began.

"You've got to take that eight-forty-three to Boston—if we catch it."

"Hell!" Hemming cast a glance at Bob and straightened as if to get a better look at the one propounding such unexpected information.

He was nodded back again.

"Listen! Last night two men . . . got the description?" Hemming nodded. "Made a haul. Pull that package . . . left pocket. Take the slip . . . yes, that's what they got." Hemming cast his eye down the list and whistled. ". . . understand? They may try to get rid of them quick . . . Packard's Agency . . . yes, wire everywhere . . . no. Don't hunt for them . . . but . . . yes . . . a quiet notice and with it their description . . . if anyone tries to unload, nab them, and 'phone me . . . just hold them . . . not the regular police, no. Tell Packard to hold . . . what? . . . oh, any old excuse. I'll be responsible . . . sure." And the car lurched around a curve and straightened out upon a long straight stretch.

Hemming leaned over and rummaged in the bag at his feet. The assortment brought a smile to his lips, but he said nothing.

Then he began to go over the information he had, at the same time slapping his pockets to locate his meagre possessions.

"Money!" he howled as he had slapped every pocket twice.

Bob motioned for him to take the wheel and dove under his long duster.

A roll of bills was exchanged.

Hemming considered again, endeavouring to adjust his clothing a trifle, likewise to decide just what kind of a lunatic asylum his friend had dropped into over at Wilderness Lodge.

He leaned over to Bob Hernald's ear. "Description, again!"

More carefully and in detail the information was imparted, and this time he gave the added description of the man whom he had seen in the library, the one he connected with Meryl Sewell's glove.

"Marsden, Jack Marsden's father, will be on that train." A glance at the clock on the dashboard. "We won't get there in time to do anything more than make it. . . . note in my left pocket . . . no, here . . . no—take the wheel." A long search. "Lost, by George!" He ran through his pockets again. "Yes—but you know him." A nod. "Tell him all and . . . yes . . . tell what you are to do . . . tell him everything . . . yes, yes . . . 'phone me from North Station as to what he says and . . . and right, 'phone me from there if you've got any questions to ask."

Wolfboro, straight ahead as a speck on the lake's edge, and far below it down the lake from the on-racing car, a thin, fast-moving column of smoke that went

straight into the air a space, and then, as if struck by a mighty hand, spread, and trembling, broke.

Hemming pointed. Bod nodded, and again the spark was advanced a little, the throttle opened and the car seemingly with a groan at the demands made, shook itself, leaped ahead and, at easily seventy-odd miles an hour, swept along the lake road, the one over which not so long ago he had looked for Kendon, down the hill past the unpainted house—up—a slight slacking of speed—a quick turn, and Hemming, dress-suit case in hand, was across the platform and on to the steps of the train, gaining headway every moment.

He turned then to her, so quiet during the ride.

"Oh!" she cried, leaning forward, her eyes on the fast vanishing cars and a dishevelled and still rather muddled young man waving a farewell from the back platform, "you did it!"

Then her eyes sought his and the warm colour in her cheeks deepened. "You do everything!"

CHAPTER XXIII

SPECULATIONS

BACK over the cool roads, under the shade of the huge boughs they went, and at a speed more sane, as they had that day the two first met.

One stop only, at the Hanover Club, to put the package of bonds away safely, a thing impossible before.

"Was it only a few weeks ago," he suggested rather than asked, "that you and I, for the first time, travelled this way together?"

"No." She shook her head most positively. "We've known each other always!"

"I thought so," he agreed, and not a shade of a smile was on his lips.

The lake was brilliant, and as they watched the tiny waves touch, kiss, and go on the long sandy beach they were running close beside, he recalled she had only seen it from afar.

"As soon as Jack Marsden is back, and your uncle is better, we'll make him take us all over the lake. He's got a thirty-footer that can hum!"

"Jack Marsden?"

"Yes. Didn't you know he would be here by Saturday night?"

"Is he Mr. Marsden's son?"

"Yes—my friend. That's how I happened to come

up here, you know. While Jack and I were in college, his father came up with your uncle. The first summer Jack and I camped out on Grey Island, halfway across the lake. Then college days ended, and because we had come to love the place we hit on the plan of having a shack up here where we could come. We got a few fellows together and started the Hanover Club."

"Your best friend! Ah, you will be glad!"

"I've been wishing he would come ever since this affair began," he spoke absently—without thinking.

"Since what affair began?"

He turned and looked at her, slowed down the car, pushed up his goggles and——

"It was to be this morning, wasn't it? Are you ready for a very tame story?" And then he told her the fabrication he had woven the night before in the darkness.

"You see," he finished, "when I met you up there on the Larmer Road, I didn't know all the facts. Then Mr. Marsden and I were labouring under the delusion that you had been abducted. Fancy it! We had really dressed the affair up quite romantically. So, I tried to make those men prisoners. They didn't know me and, naturally, thought I was a bit crazy. All around, it was a very good case of misunderstanding."

He was surprised to see how readily she accepted the tale, surprised and likewise grieved at the thought of her frank belief in him, upon which he was imposing. And yet, it was best for her; that was his only excuse.

"And this wild ride to catch the train at Wolfboro?" she questioned.

He had purposely refrained from speaking of it, for he knew it would only mean an added lie and he shrank from any more than was absolutely necessary to her peace of mind.

Now he must tell her something, yet what? Had she heard his instructions to Hemming? Possibly the fast moving car, the wild hum of the motor and the fact that he had yelled into his friend's very ear had prevented her catching anything at all except a word here and there.

"You heard me tell him about those two men?" He was resolved to find out what she did know for he would not risk being caught in a lie to her.

"Yes, just that. I couldn't held hearing," she pleaded, with that quick embarrassment he had come to look for, "and something about some bonds or something."

"It was nothing," he assured her. "You see, I got word two men were going to try and unload some securities on the market,—on the banks,—and I wanted to stop them if I could. That's why I pulled my good friend Hemming so unceremoniously out of his bath, and bundled him off to Boston."

She looked quite mystified.

"You never heard of the stock market, did you? No —well, if certain men have certain securities, and you have some too, and these men start to sell their securities,

you are liable to lose thereby. I found such were the circumstances and that friends of mine stood liable to lose considerable, so I got Hemming to hustle down to watch affairs."

She felt that *perhaps* she understood now. He felt guilty of the added deception, and then as he studied the clear-cut face at his side for the first time considered her as Gale Sewell's heir.

His wealth, no one knew what it amounted to, and Joseph Sewell's legacy! He whistled softly, but the whistle changed to a pucker and the pucker to a scowl. He would have much preferred her to be penniless; he would rather have furnished everything—done everything.

The car took a sudden lurch and he came out of his dream.

Furnish everything! Do everything! He! What was he thinking of? Had he taken possession of her? He glanced up out of the corner of his eyes and realised that he had, or rather, that she had taken possession of him.

As his heart leaped at the thought, it chilled almost as quickly, for why should she care aught for him?

She had come from years of convent life and he was the first man, the only man, she had ever known. It wasn't flattering to feel that on that account she must care, nor was it probable.

"You're a very serious individual," she suggested meekly.

He laughed and shook off the mood.

"Do you realise," he began, "we have got to put our heads together and scare up a bit of excitement?" He personally felt, as he made the suggestion, a few days of quiet would do no harm. "We can't simply eat three meals a day and bask under the palm trees."

His remark, as a whole, was clear, if a bit ambiguous in some of its terms.

"How long shall you be with us?"

"How long? Well—why, I don't know," he finished lamely. The thought of leaving had never occurred to him.

"It will be some time, won't it? Perhaps a long, long time."

"I'll stay as long as you wish me—as long as your uncle wishes me."

"Oh," she laughed, "you won't go away ever! You know, uncle tells me to do just whatever you say for me to do—to appeal to you always, if in doubt."

He opened his eyes wide. "Indeed!" he laughed, a joyous laugh. "To think of it—a young lady of twenty-odd so ready to take advice. The wonders of the world are never ending."

"Yes," she nodded, "but do you think I should?" A glance from out the corners of half-closed eyes while a lock of bronze-brown hair flew across the ivory-tinted cheeks to strike a contrast. "Do you think I should?"

Woman, surely. "Yes, I do." He was *very* serious, and his lips were tight together—perhaps to hide the

smile behind. "You should do whatever I tell you to do, and nothing else."

"Oh!" she cried. "You develop a new character every day."

"But you haven't known me so very long."

"Haven't I? I thought I had known you all my life—longer!"

Her words took the banter out of his voice, sobering his thoughts. They were spoken without meaning,—that he realised,—but, too, they carried with them a certain inference, far different than he had been accustomed to. She was so true, open, and frank. Unconsciously, almost, he felt the need of infinite care in his speech with her. The world and its ways she must, to a certain extent, see through his eyes, and the need of presenting a true view was there.

It was she again who broke the silence.

"It was here that we parted that first time."

They were on the long hill up the mountain side. He glanced up with a start.

"By the way! Tell me what the two men were like, no, the three men—there were three men in the car?"

She described them, and two of them were the men of the Larmer road, the third undoubtedly the one who had come so strangely through the bookcase.

Suddenly he recalled the glove he had found.

"You didn't stop at Wilderness Lodge at all, did you?"

"Why, no. We went right to Mrs. Darneau's."

"Of course. By the way, have you lost a brown glove?"

"A brown glove? Oh, the ones I wore on the train—why, yes. But then, they aren't really lost, for Mr.—Mr. Smart has them."

"Mr. Smart! Who, pray, is Mr. Smart?" He feared he was treading dangerous ground and that his many questions and seeming ignorance of these men, in view of the explanation he had given her, might arouse her suspicion. Yet he was curious in the extreme to find out how one of her gloves could have reached Wilderness Lodge when she had not been there, so pressed the point.

"Why, he was the man on the front seat; the one who ran the car."

"Yes, of course, but what makes you think he has your gloves?"

"Because he picked them up. When we got to Mrs. Darneau's, and I was going into the house, I missed them. One of the men, it was Mr. Darneau, I think, called back, and Mr. Smart answered that he had them."

"Yes."

"Then I heard someone say that he had to go away at once, so I suppose he has my gloves still."

"Had to go away at once. You didn't hear them say where?"

"No. Someone said that someone wanted to see him."

"I see!"

"But why?" Now her curiosity was aroused. "Why all these questions?"

"Oh, nothing." He turned it off with a laugh. "Only I found a glove, and I thought I recognised it as yours."

"Mr. Smart must have dropped it."

"Yes, I suppose he did." And again he fell into a brown study. Had the one who wanted to see Mr. Smart "at once" been someone at Wilderness Lodge? Had Smart gone there, and while there dropped the glove; then later, missing it, returned to look for it, fearing it might be found?

A dozen possibilities seem probable, yet nothing more. Some day he would run up against Smart, and if he did he would find out not only about a small brown glove, but more important of all, the name of the one who wanted to see him "at once."

For now, orders or no, he had resolved for his own peace of mind to see the thing through, and find out who was at the bottom of the whole business.

Kendon seemed cleared, for the purpose of the abduction of both the old servant and his mistress could be explained by a desire to get them out of the way, pending the securing of the bonds. It would never have done for these men to allow Meryl Sewell to go free while they carried off Kendon. Kendon they necessarily had to have to find out from him where the securities were hidden. That information once obtained, both would have been released, so no real harm was meant to either

of them. It really narrowed the question down to the person who had been able to ascertain the existence of the bonds.

He must have access to Wilderness Lodge. It was to Wilderness Lodge that Smart had gone as quickly as the double abduction had been accomplished.

"Where," he muttered under his breath, "is this leading me?"

He began to see why Marsden should hesitate to press the search. The end was impossible to foresee.

CHAPTER XXIV

GALE SEWELL TAKES A HAND

As they ran up the long, winding drive and caught sight of the broad porches through a vista in the trees, a sight astonishing to both met their gaze.

Gale Sewell, in a huge reclining chair, was on the porch, Kendon hovering near, Doctor Bashton not far off.

"Uncle's downstairs!" Meryl Sewell cried.

Bob Hernald slowed down the car and ran quietly to the steps. Bashton met them, and his smile was reassuring.

"He would come down," he explained, "so we fixed him here as comfortably as we could."

They hurried to the gaunt old man, and he greeted them with a cheery smile.

"You see," he turned to the girl as her hand slipped into his, "it's quite time I was about. A little weak yet, but in a few days I shall be as much myself as ever."

"It may be," Bashton agreed, speaking in a low voice to Bob Hernald. "He's got a constitution that is all in his favour. He has made up his mind to get well, and that's always half the battle."

"But isn't it too soon for him to be out?"

"No," Bashton shook his head. "Look at him. You

haven't seen him for over two weeks. See how much better he is. Why, he's got some colour in his face. I told you he was not very ill. If it hadn't been for that night in the woods he'd have been out long ago."

"What decided him to move downstairs to-day?"

"Kendon told him that Mr. Marsden had left. Then he called for you, and Kendon explained you had gone over to the club; that Miss Sewell was with you. Then he called me and insisted he would move down here."

The change seemed to have been for the best, if one was to judge by Gale's Sewell's spirits alone. There was more animation in his face, his voice seemed stronger, and surely the smile on his lips spoke of an added cheerfulness.

Meryl Sewell slipped away to remove the dust of the trip, and as she passed through the doorway the watchful eyes of Gale Sewell turned back to fall upon Bob Hernald.

"Draw up a chair, Mr. Hernald." And in the motion toward the seat Kendon was dismissed.

"They tell me Mr. Marsden has left suddenly. You had a note from him?"

"Yes. He has gone to New York, and possibly South. Yesterday he mentioned it might be necessary for him to do so, yet at that time I hardly expected he would leave so soon."

"I see." The gray head nodded slowly. "And what took him off all of a sudden?"

"He didn't say. He only mentioned he had to catch

the early train to Boston this morning, and asked me to explain to you. He had expected to see you before he left—at least, he said as much yesterday."

"And how long is he to be gone?"

"Three weeks, I believe."

"I doubt if we see him back as soon as that."

Bob Hernald glanced up quickly, for there was a note in the cold tone as if the questioner knew more than the one from whom he appeared to be seeking information.

"He said possibly four weeks."

"I dare say."

Thus he dismissed the subject of the lawyer's departure, likewise the purpose of the trip, and Bob drew a breath of relief that no more minute explanation was demanded of him.

For a while they kept silent, and then came a light footstep in the hall and the dainty rustle of skirts. But Meryl Sewell saw the two together, and turned away to speak to the doctor.

Her appearance, however, stirred the older man from his drowsy restfulness.

"By the way," he suddenly questioned, "have you any inkling of these men, the ones that carried her away?"

"Why, no," Bob answered, considerably surprised at the question. "We made no further effort to locate them, in compliance with your wishes."

"In compliance with—oh, yes, yes, to be sure. Er—

I didn't know but what you had stumbled upon something. An old man tucked away in his room all the time can't keep track of things very well."

For a moment Bob considered whether to speak of the night's occurrence, but finally decided he would say nothing. He wished first to talk with Kendon, and, too, he feared to alarm the other when a day or two of delay would do no harm. By then Gale Sewell might be stronger, so he shook his head to the implied question.

"No. There's nothing new just now."

"I see. But come, I must not bother over these things too much—yet. Wait! What did the men look like? There were one or two?"

"Three."

"Yes, three. What did they look like?"

"There was the one in the carriage, up there on the Larmer road——"

"Yes, but I do not remember his appearance."

"Well, let's see." And then as briefly as possible he described the three men. He could furnish a good description of the two of the Larmer road, while, with the added information given by Meryl Sewell, he was able to furnish a pretty accurate one of Smart.

Gale Sewell nodded as he finished.

"She stayed with these men up there in that farmhouse?"

"There was a woman."

"And her description?"

"I didn't see her and I haven't asked your niece."

"No, I wouldn't. Oh, by the way, does Meryl know —you have told her something?"

"I was obliged to,"—Bob blushed guiltily, thinking of the deception he had practiced,—"and I took the liberty of digressing from the facts a bit. I didn't want to alarm her."

"No—and the story as she knows it? Let me have that, and we will stop."

Briefly he repeated the tale he had built for Meryl Sewell.

"Good enough to be possible. Thanks. And now once more, this third man. What did he look like?"

"Smart?"

"Yes, yes, Smart!"

Again Bob furnished the description, while Gale Sewell listened, weary eyelids all but closed.

As the other finished he nodded.

"Thanks. Just call Meryl. That is enough business for now."

Later as Bob Hernald walked back from the stable, now used as a temporary garage, he recalled Gale Sewell's interrogations. In a very brief time the owner of Wilderness Lodge had acquainted himself with all the essential detail of the happenings of the past few weeks outside of the robbery.

The thought came suddenly that perhaps his interrogator knew the inwardness of it all, or, if not possessed of full knowledge,—his very quiet acceptance of events that should have stirred most anyone must indicate some

prior knowledge,—he felt reasonably certain of whom the men must be.

To Bob Hernald such a possibility seemed a fair conjecture. Then why this quiet acceptance? Was it because he had his niece safe?

Possibly he felt too old to cross swords with his adversaries, after once gaining the upper hand.

But the bonds? A good round sum of those were gone. Surely he would try to recover them, if he knew of their loss. Then he should be told, and forthwith a hunt for Kendon was inaugurated.

"It's either you or I, Kendon," Bob announced most positively, after he had shown the old servant why his master must be told of the existence of his brother's legacy.

"But, sir,"—and the face was troubled,—"if I had them all, I would not mind, but now I must tell him of it, confessing I have kept the secret from him all this time, the only one I ever did, and still be unable to deliver over my charge."

"I see." Bob was touched by the old servant's deep humiliation. "Still, you've held silent concerning this legacy because Mr. Joseph Sewell so ordered."

"Yes, sir. You see he had never seen his child, and up to the very last never spoke of her. When he came to die—that is, when he knew he could not get well,—he grieved at the way he had treated her, and so gave me all he had left, gave it to me for her, to do in some small way what he should have done."

"And the other would have meant much more," Bob soliloquised half absently.

"What other, sir?"

"The father's love. But come. You did as you were told, and now you surely must acquaint Mr. Sewell with the facts and let him help you recover that portion which is lost. Don't you see you must? At first I thought it was not best, that a few days' delay would do no harm, but now I am satisfied he must be told. You need not say a word to Miss Sewell until the whole has been recovered."

But Kendon hesitated.

"Then I will. It must be done, Kendon."

"You may, sir, you may. I—I never could face Mr. Sewell and tell him with my own lips that I had failed in a commission his brother left with me—left with me on his deathbed for the child he had never seen."

"Kendon," and Bob Hernald's voice was quite low, "I'll make it right with him, but he must be told."

The old servant spread out his hands resignedly and turned away.

Until he had passed out of sight under the trees, Bob Hernald watched him, feeling for the man in his bitter disappointment at having, to his mind, failed in a duty which had been a matter of deep pride to him. Then he turned slowly back to the house.

He found Gale Sewell as he left him, Meryl at his side reading. The half-closed lids opened slowly at his approaching footsteps and the gaunt hand was raised ever

so slightly. Bob moved to his side, and leaning down, caught the low spoken words.

"Just the same voice. She is like Meryl in everything. I can close my eyes and—remember."

On the thin bloodless lips was a questioning smile, and in the eyes the light of remembrance, the longing, the thankfulness for this much, and too, a half-whimsical appeal: "Do you think me very childish?"

CHAPTER XXV

GALE SEWELL'S FIRST MOVE

After luncheon, a meal Gale Sewell enjoyed with them, for the table was brought to the wide veranda, Bob Hernald found an opportunity to speak again with the owner of Wilderness Lodge.

"Yes, go ahead," the gray head nodded in reply to the question of whether he cared to be bothered still further that day. "Let me hear what more there may be."

As briefly as possible, Bob related the story of Joseph's Sewell's legacy as told him by Kendon, the incidents of the night before and also the true meaning of his trip that morning, and of Hemming's journey to Boston.

The older man might have been asleep so quiet was he as the tale was told.

"How did they learn of these certificates?" he demanded as the other finished.

"That seems hard to determine," Bob answered slowly. "From what Kendon tells me they must have learned of their existence while he was away. On his return, they evidently carried him off for the purpose of forcing from him the hidden place."

Gale Sewell nodded slowly. "But why carry Meryl off as well?"

"They couldn't take one without the other. I've no doubt they simply meant to secure the money after forcing Kendon to tell them where it was hidden, and then let him go. At the same time they would have brought your niece back. Don't you think they counted perhaps on Kendon saying nothing of the legacy, at least, not for a few weeks, after he found it was gone? In that way they would have been able to get rid of the securities and safely away. They were all negotiable."

"A very fair theory. And so, your friend has gone to Boston to use a detective agency?"

"I took the responsibility, advising him, however, to speak to Mr. Marsden, whom he would find on the train."

"Ah! Marsden went down on that train?"

"Yes. I didn't get there in time to see him, but Hemming will explain to him. He can be depended upon."

"You friend will 'phone you?"

"As soon as he gets in."

"When he does, keep him on the wire until you can let me know what he has to say. As for Kendon, I know his disposition, so shall say nothing to him of this matter just now. But you can assure him his course has my approval, though the tower was a poor place and the letter a little careless."

"He did the best he could."

Gale Sewell nodded.

"By the way, Kendon's little package has always been known to me."

"What?"

"It was not so intended, for my brother left the whole to Kendon to handle as his own."

"Then how——"

"Among my brother's papers was the list of these securities, the first list he made, I should judge. On the corner was jotted down: 'Will give to Kendon for her, or for him,' or some such words. The paper had, I judge, been copied, and this draft was all crumpled up as if it had been intended to be thrown away. It evidently got in among the few papers Kendon brought me, by error."

"I see. So you have a full list of the contents of the packages?"

"Oh, yes."

"And Kendon knows nothing of it?"

"Why should he? The money was his, unless my niece was found. I had no concern with it."

"Quite true. But doesn't it occur to you now, Mr. Sewell, that the existence of these bonds became known through that list you have? Didn't someone see that?"

"Locked up in my safe! How could anyone? It is long past the time when your friend should have called you up, is it not?"

"It is." And accepting the change in subject to indicate a desire on the other's part to drop the discussion, Bob leaned back in his chair, and silence fell upon them both.

Thus they sat for a half-hour, perhaps, Gale Sewell with eyelids closed, apparently sleeping, while Bob drummed idly on the rail and speculated on the new turn to affairs.

That the man beside him knew more than he cared to explain seemed apparent, and the thought kept constantly recurring that Marsden must have known that Gale Sewell was better informed than they, and so hesitated to go further in the matter.

Perhaps now that the owner of Wilderness Lodge was himself again, they would get at a complete solution of all the mystery.

To break in upon these conjectures came the demanding ring of the telephone.

Answering the call Bob bade Hemming hold the wire, and hurried back to Gale Sewell.

"What does Hemming report?" The languid eyes opened slowly, seemingly lifeless, yet under their lids a quick observer might have noticed, ere they closed again, a quick, sharp, questioning flash.

"He met Marsden on the train and explained to him. It seems Marsden was considerably excited over the news and yet he told Hemming to do nothing further, as any act along the line I suggested would be in the direction of a search for these men, and that you had forbidden. Marsden also told him that he would get word to me, and that later, when you were able, the matter could be taken up with you."

"I see," slowly the gray head nodded. "And why

didn't your friend call you up before? It's what, two o'clock? Yes. He reached Boston at twelve-thirty."

"It seems he took more stock in my instructions than in Marsden's. As he left the depot he caught sight of a man answering the description of one of the three. On his own hook he followed the fellow, and has just seen him register at the Parker House. He is calling from there."

"I see,"—as uninterested as before, apparently,— "and which one of the three is it?"

"It's the one we know as Smart, and he has registered under that name."

"Smart? Yes."

"But he, you see, can't have the bonds. It was the other two who got them."

"Quite right, yet telephone your friend to keep an eye on Smart, nevertheless. Tell him to get a couple of men from this agency you know, but don't notify the banks; just keep an eye on Smart. If he tries to leave town before to-morrow night, let them arrest him on any charge. Of course, be sure it's Smart."

"I see." Bob Hernald understood then that the men before him was working to a definite point. His listless air covered a multitude of energy, and yet already the effort was telling on his strength.

"Tell him, too," Gale Sewell added as the other started toward the house, "to call you again in half an hour."

Bob hurried away to give the necessary instructions, and then back to the side of the reclining chair.

"By the way," Gale Sewell looked up suddenly, after a long silence of perhaps ten minutes, "can you—er—is your car fit to make Boston to-night?"

"Make Boston?" The other was puzzled as well as surprised.

"Yes, Boston. Start at once, if you can—take someone. Isn't there a machinist over at the Club? I thought so. Well, get him. You should be in Boston by night; that is, some time during the night."

"Why, yes," making a mental note of the distance. "We should be there before midnight."

"And could you stand it to turn right around and come back?"

Bob Hernald nodded.

"Good! I'll 'phone your friend—or Meryl will—when he calls, that you will join him at the Parker House sometime before midnight."

"And when I get there?"

"Get the number of Smart's room."

"Yes?"

"If you find it is Smart, and I guess it will be, ask him to dress and came back with you at once."

"Ask him to come back with me? But suppose he won't?" He could hardly see why Smart should.

"Find a way to bring him. Don't raise a row, but the force is with you, and yet—say I want to see him. Say

that Mr. Sewell believes it is best for Mr. Kerveil to have a talk with him at once."

"Kerveil!" Bob Hernald was on his feet.

Then Gale Sewell did know who their antagonists really were!

CHAPTER XXVI

A NIGHT'S RUN

A TELEPHONE message to Michael, Hemming's machinist, brought that worthy out of a peaceful doze to eager expectancy by the side of the main road off from the Hanover Club.

With him he carried a small bundle of extra tools, and there he waited, only knowing that the voice which had spoken of an "all-night trip" and cautioned him to tell no one at the Club he was leaving, had enough of an undercurrent of excitement in it to bespeak an interesting run ahead.

From the telephone Bob hurried to the porch.

"I caught Michael, and he'll be ready as soon as I am."

"Good," Gale Sewell nodded slowly. "Then I'll expect you and Smart—we'll call him Smart—back by morning?"

"If the car holds out, and I think she will."

"If she shouldn't, get another."

Bob raised his eyebrows.

"Yes," Gale Sewell nodded, "I'm particularly anxious to talk with Smart, so let nothing interfere. Of course, an early train from Boston could be used, but that would get him here rather late. Meryl might be about——"

"I'll bring him back, and in my car. He had a finger in the abduction of your niece, and he'll come with me; quietly, if he will—but come he must."

Gale Sewell glanced up quickly at the tone. His eyebrows lifted, for up to then the possibility of his Meryl finding a place in another heart had not occurred to him.

Then, philosopher that he was, and always had been, he half smiled and agreed mentally it could not have been better arranged.

"Well, then it is settled. I'll see you two by daylight. Just bring him to the library when you come. I'll be waiting, and"—as Bob turned away—"take money with you. I always keep cash on hand up here." He held out a soft chamois purse. "There's a thousand dollars."

"A thousand dollars! I shan't need——"

But Gale Sewell waved away the objection.

"If you don't need it, bring it back. To get a man out of a city hotel, when that man doesn't care to leave, may cost money. Too, you may have to hire a machine, or buy one—at least; forearmed is no harm."

Bob nodded, and, with the final promise to be back by daylight, hurried toward the stables.

He had just turned to climb into the car after running over each part carefully, when he glanced up, conscious of someone else near at hand.

In the middle of the far doorway stood Meryl Sewell.

She peered in, for it was dark in the huge room com-

pared to the sunlight without, trying to see who it was at the car.

He held silent, for as she hesitated at the entrance, the bright sunlight on her hair and dainty white dress made a picture that caused him to catch his breath quickly.

She was like some fine, wild creature of the wood as she stood there. Her chin was tilted just a bit, her nostrils dilated and out from under half-drooping eyelids looked eyes that seemed now, in the sunlight upon her face, larger, deeper, more alluring than ever before.

The motor had stopped and she spoke aloud to herself.

"I thought I heard the machine." Then she turned away slowly, a smile on her lips.

He let her go without a word, for he knew Gale Sewell would not want her to know of the trip. Yet he could have carried no more pleasant recollection with him if he had tarried to speak to her. There was the picture of her in white, the green trees behind, the door a frame for her graceful figure, her face pulsing with the joy of perfect womanhood.

Quickly he drew a deep breath and sprang to the seat. Silently he ran the car out of the door and by a back drive gained the main road.

The picture of her there in the doorway was still with him as he picked up Michael, and with a rush headed the car along the lake road toward Wolfboro.

"Where to, Mr. Hernald?" Michael asked, as they turned away from the lake, Wolfboro behind them.

"Boston, and back again to-night."

Michael nodded, and settled back in his seat as comfortably as he could.

Around the lake they went to Alton Bay, and then headed as straight as possible for Concord.

For a while Bob Hernald drove, and then Michael took the wheel only later to change back again.

Speed had to be made, and yet through the small villages time was lost again and again, yet steadily to the even hum of the motor they covered mile after mile.

A punctured tire and some slight bit of mechanism that went wrong with the engine caused them to stop twice before they paused for dinner. Then, with lamps lighted, the roads clear, the car was put to its best speed for the final lap to Boston.

Into the gathering darkness they flew, and to Bob Hernald it was the final run to a solution of all the past mystery.

That Gale Sewell knew the abductor of his niece was very apparent, and then through Bob Hernald's mind crossed the thought that Smart's visit to Wilderness Lodge must have been for the purpose of calling upon its owner.

It seemed, in a way, the only explanation. If Gale Sewell knew all along who had carried off his niece, their night in the woods might have been the outcome of a sane determination to find her.

Yet even as he drew such a conclusion, he could not accept it as logical.

He shook his head; the puzzle too much for him to fathom.

Yet back again came the question, and during the long ride he had ample time to speculate again and again; to draw one conclusion only to thrust it aside, to draw another, and yet another, each finally rejected in the end.

Now low dark houses began to spring up by the roadside, and then Michael pointed ahead.

In the heavens was the faint light that hangs over a city at night.

On the car tore. Houses grew closer together, then through the open square of a suburban village they rushed, swung past a brilliantly lighted street car, sent forth a wild call to a belated crowd at the street corner and then on, the houses growing thinner, open country again, but the lights of Boston nearer.

Then the outskirts of the city proper and, finally, on into the heart of the narrow winding streets until, panting, the car drew up before the Parker House.

Dirty and tired, Bob Hernald swung to the curb and crossed the sidewalk.

Hemming met him in the lobby.

"What in the deuce?" he demanded, but Bob cut him short.

"Where's Smart?"

"In bed, I guess. But what——"

"Do you know where his room is?"

"Yes. I've got a couple of men on his floor now. The clerk here is asking questions, though."

"I'll settle him later. What floor is it?"

"Fourth."

"Come on."

As they went up in the elevator Bob explained that they were to go back at once, taking Smart along.

"To-night!" Hemming exclaimed. "Will he go?"

"He's got to go—that's all," Bob answered shortly. "Stay out here in the hall within call and keep your two men with you. I'm going to rout Smart out."

Shifting his revolver to an outside pocket, he knocked sharply on the door Hemming pointed out to him.

A second knock brought forth a sleepy response.

"Mr. Smart?" Bob questioned.

"Yes. What's wanted?"

"A message for you."

A muttered protest came from within, and then the switch clicked, and the transom was framed in light.

As the bolt turned, Bob pulled his cap well over his face.

The door opened a crack, and then before the one within could demand the purpose of his caller, Bob pushed into the room past Smart.

With an oath, the man wheeled as Bob raised his cap.

"Don't you know me?"

"Know you? What the devil, sir, do you mean by such actions?"

"Stop!" Bob ordered sharply, as Smart made a move toward the office telephone. "Listen to what I've got to say!"

"Listen! Who in hell are you and what do you mean?" The man's round face was red with anger.

"My name's of no importance——"

"What——"

"Do I want? Keep still and I'll tell you."

"You——"

"Now look here, Mr. Smart," Bob stepped close to the other, "just keep cool. I've got a car waiting outside and I want you to take a ride with me."

"A ride! Are you crazy?" The small eyes took on sudden alarm as they gazed at the huge coated figure, as if suddenly the man half feared it was a maniac he had to deal with.

"Not in the least." Bob laughed at the look in the other's eyes. "I simply want to take you back with me to Wilderness Lodge."

"To Wilderness—to——!" But Smart's voice failed him.

"Yes, to Wilderness Lodge. I've no time to waste. Get dressed quickly."

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"Mr. Sewell wants to talk with you."

"Mr. Sewell——" Then suddenly Smart stepped back and his voice grew cold. "I fail to understand you, sir. Leave my room at once or I'll call the office!"

But Bob Hernald only laughed. "That won't go, Mr. Kerveil. Get dressed!"

The man's attempted haughtiness dropped from him at once, and he could only stare.

"Listen! I've got three men outside. The force is with me, and so you had best raise no further objections. Mr. Sewell has sent for you, and take you back I will. Will you go quietly or not?"

For an instant the man hesitated, and then with a nod, turned to his clothes.

Bob, his point won, moved to the door and called Hemming.

"Pay off your two fellows. Get your stuff into the car. I'll be down with him in a minute."

"Will he go?" Hemming demanded in surprise.

Bob nodded and turned back.

All the fight was out of the other, if real fight there had been at all, and soon Smart, or Kerveil, was stowed away in the tonneau, Hemming at his side and the long ride back begun.

Few stops they made; fewer words passed between them. Once or twice one of the four fell into a broken doze, for the wild rush of the wind, the steady hum of the motor and the flying landscape seemed to lull one to sleep.

A bite to eat they got, in lieu of an early breakfast and then once again the car rushed through Wolfboro and on up the lake road, as the sun broke over the tops of the mist-hung Ossipees.

Kendon waited for them on the porch, and at his direction Bob conducted Smart to the library.

Gale Sewell waited there, standing tall and lank before a hearth fire that burned brightly.

"Thanks, Mr. Hernald," came the quick greeting, as the door opened. "I noted your friends were with you. Kendon will give you a bite to eat and I will see you again in a moment."

No recognition of Kerveil at all, and even as Bob closed the door behind him and stepped quietly into the hall, the two men did not speak.

A half hour passed, and then Gale Sewell appeared suddenly at the dining-room door.

"Is it asking too much, Mr. Hernald, for you to catch that early train at Wolfboro? Mr. Smart wishes to reach Boston as soon as he can."

"Boston!" Bob exclaimed, and then checked himself. "Why, no."

"Thanks!" Gale Sewell nodded. "I'll take Mr. Hemming in charge."

Once again, a silent, crestfallen man at his side, Bob Hernald made the run to Wolfboro.

They reached it as the train pulled in, and fagged out, he leaned back in his seat as Smart crossed the platform and climbed onto the last car.

"I wonder," he muttered as he turned and once more headed back to Wilderness Lodge, "what they said. I wonder—yes," he nodded slowly, "I wonder if I will ever know."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PASSING DAYS

WEEKS instead of days seemed to have passed since that wild night ride to Boston, with its immediate right-about-face and back again to Wilderness Lodge.

During those brief days Jack Marsden, the same old, stocky-built Jack, who had picked up impossible drives at short on the 'Varsity team, had joined the three at Wilderness Lodge.

His coming had been the occasion of a double celebration, in a way, for Gale Sewell, much gained in strength, had joined the three for his first dinner downstairs.

Then had followed gay days for all—days spent on the lake, in Bob Hernald's car, and days under the leafy trees for a good long ride over superb roads.

All four joined in the trips on the lake or in the car, but the horseback rides were out of the question for Gale Sewell, while Jack Marsden refused to participate.

"But why," Bob had argued on one occasion, though, truth to tell, he had no real quarrel with Jack for his refusal, "why not join us?"

"Why?" Jack had laughed provokingly. "You ask that?"

"I——" Bob began.

"You," Jack broke in, "up to your old tricks again."

"Old tricks!" Bob responded somewhat vaguely.

"Playing the gay Lothario."

"Look here, Jack, I——"

Jack dropped his hand on his friend's shoulder. "No?" he propounded solemnly, studying the other's face. "My boy, you are—you are. You, the target of a dozen scheming maters—you, the prize catch! You, caught at last!" And then as he read confession in the uneasiness of the other: "'Pon my word, it is—it is so! I congratulate you!"

"You—you go to the deuce," Bob Hernald flung out, disregarding the proffered hand. "You don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't? Say, mister, I'm not blind. Can I tell her what a lucky girl she is?"

But Bob fell silent of a sudden and a troubled look crept into his eyes.

His friend saw it and the banter left his voice. "What's wrong, Bob?" He didn't feel he could be mistaken.

"It's this," Bob answered slowly, resolved, the question having come up, to speak of much that was on his mind. "She's so different. Perhaps you can't see it, Jack; you didn't meet her first as I did."

"So different?"

"Don't you see? She's lived all her life in a con-

vent. She's never seen anything of the world. Why, until you came, I was the only man she had ever known."

"Well, what of it?" Jack was at a loss to see the point.

"Don't you see?" Bob flung out, almost angry because of the fear in his own mind. "She may think she cares for me, but if she'd known a hundred other men, as most girls have—if she'd met someone else, as she did me, if——"

"If, if if!" Jack broke in, and now his mirth had full sway. "Say, mister, what kind of a proposition are you building? She cares for you now, but had she met a hundred or so other fellows she would not? For shame! You do her an injustice. You yourself should be the first to oppose such a suggestion."

"Not that, Jack, it's not that. You can't see my point—I can't explain it, I dare say, yet it's there. She has known no one else; she has gone nowhere. Don't you see?"

"I see you are a bigger duffer than I could have believed possible."

"But, Jack, I'm giving her no chance if I should speak now. Why, she was, in a way, put in my charge, when Mr. Sewell was ill. That may make her feel indebted to me, might influence her. All the circumstances make it——"

"A very pretty setting."

"You don't look at it in the right way," Bob in-

sisted. "I'm a firm believer in carrying one's castles by storm, but here I must be very fair—I must not speak——"

"Must not speak!" Jack Marsden flung back, with some disgust. "Say, Bob, how long shall you wait? In just how long a time, please, will she have seen enough of this very prosaic world for you to be satisfied?"

"That's not the point," Bob argued; and, in truth, it was not.

The fear that was Bob Hernald's, expressed poorly even to his closest friend, was hard to analyse, and yet it was there, the one thing that kept him silent even thus long against the constant-growing demands of his love.

Time and time again he held back from an open avowal only because he feared it was not right for him to speak, and yet even such a feeling could not place bans upon his tongue forever.

She was before him daily, and to look upon her in all her beauty with the feeling he must hold silent was hard indeed.

She seemed to him to have grown taller since he first met her, and while there was still at times that pretty embarrassment that he so well remembered as of their first meeting, she now seemed far more a woman—one grown so suddenly—like an opening flower to the touch of early sunrise, its beauty bathed in midnight dew.

In fine, it seemed hardly possible to him that this could be the girl he had first met so lonely and forlorn in the little hotel at Wolfboro.

Yet as he doubted, he wondered why he should. The same perfect face; the same wonderful locks of magic bronze; the clear skin yet now with the added tint of brown that was needed to make the whole perfect.

On her favourite horse, her hair flying, cheeks aflame, head up and a wonderful hand on the lines, for the short tutoring, he watched her and wondered.

At tennis—bare arms, eyes alert, she was a picture that his eyes could hardly leave.

Or, at the wheel—now the mysteries of driving were no longer a sealed book—he held his breath and wondered if he could wait—should wait.

They were perplexing days to him, yet days of a full heart, glad to be alive, with her near him; days that he would never forget, but treasure to look back upon.

It was as if he were a boy again, the world a big, impossible, never-to-be-bothered-with affair, and only life and love afield.

Their paradise was the wood and field; their world the wild mountain side, guarded by rearing peaks afar, no boundaries for the beating of their heart.

And she herself lived for the first time.

Suddenly out of a mere existence she had stepped to all this, as one travels the dark woods and comes suddenly upon the edge of an opening valley. There before her the world seemed to lead away: life, eternity, fulfilment, all beyond.

From the hemming in of narrow walls to the opening panorama of life she had moved, and her heart knew

the secret of such an unfolding. Aye, and it beat to it—to the love that filled it—to the joy that was joy at the finding of place where before no place had been.

And so the two, each with a full heart, moved on—waiting for love to burst its bonds and find voice in words, unrepeatable, yet full of the only music to wake an answering chord within the other.

Then suddenly, as like a discord to Bob Hernald's song, came the thought of Marsden's mission.

Two weeks had passed since the lawyer's departure, and he might appear at any moment.

The discovery came as a shock—turning his belief that there could be but one outcome to the searching of the Irish records to the point of arguing that his conviction *might* be correct.

Before, he had been certain. But now he found himself waking each morning with fear in his heart that Marsden would return before night, bringing a message he would not admit possible, yet fearing nevertheless.

Soon it reached that point where he stopped coupling the lawyer's mission with his return, and simply thought of his personal presence again at Wilderness Lodge as typifying all that was undesirable.

Yet why should he feel so? The only answer he could find was in the very unsatisfactory explanation that the lawyer had dared to hint that Meryl was not Meryl Sewell. In his position of legal adviser to Gale Sewell, such a course was his bounden duty, and Bob

was condemning the man for following what he acknowledged was his only course.

And then suddenly the very blood in his veins seemed to turn cold. Suppose Marsden was right, and she was not Gale Sewell's niece! The thought was maddening, and he held back from it like one would from deadly poison. And then like a wild wave of joy came the thought that he held the secret to such a position in his love of her.

Let Marsden find what he might, he would shield her from the blow, if such a blow was to fall, by telling her first of his love. With that thought, all reason why he had held silent before was swept aside.

Late in the afternoon, after the thought of Marsden's return, and its possible consequences, had first come upon him, they rode forth together far over the rising mountain beyond Wilderness Lodge.

As the sun sank to rest behind the western hills, and myriad colours of gorgeousness purpled the tinted heavens, they paused coming home in a clearing on the edge of a rising slope.

In the air was the long twilight of a summer evening. The valley was before them; green, swaying tree tops, making to their view a carpet for the mystic silver lake to lie in, the whole guarded by the gray-blue distant hills rising high and low, away, to far-off quiet worlds that their valley could know nothing of, the whole dressed in the colours of the sinking sun.

For a long moment he sat viewing the stretching

panorama. Then he turned to look upon her. She wore no hat and the perfect coils of her hair were lines of living colour. The cheeks brilliant with the high colour of the ride, and her eyes—they spoke in their living depths of all he knew her to be. The fine tracery of her perfect lips gave back his smile.

"I have been dreaming a bit lately," he spoke, "dreaming of many things, and wondering—puzzling over them."

"Dreaming?" she repeated, speaking slowly. "Of the cities—of places where they are not as are we at Wilderness Lodge?"

"There are no cities—there are no other places. No, I was wondering if this could always be as it is."

"You have been thinking of something that may happen to change it all. Have you got to go away?"

"No." He shook his head slowly, as his hand fell softly on the arched neck of his horse.

"What is it then?" She spoke softly, for suddenly she had seen the look in his eyes.

"What is it?" he repeated. "Of you and me—of our meeting there in Wolfboro—of how we have gone on—just you and me!"

"Yes——"

"Of how it has run on like the even current of our glorious lake—of how it must go on—just you and me—just you and me, Meryl."

Her name slipped out softly, and as the word fell upon her ear her eyes lifted to his, and like an over-

whelming joy he read in their light an answer to his words.

"Just you and me, Meryl," he whispered, close to her now; "you and me, sweetheart."

"Oh," she cried, her voice low, "to think that you—that you care too."

"Sweetheart!" His arms were about her. "It is to be—from the first it was so meant—just you and me."

Her head slipped to his shoulder, their lips met. All about them were the silent trees—the valley before—the only sound the scampering of a gray squirrel who, like his mate of a morning not so long gone by, watched, knowing he would not be seen.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MARSDEN RETURNS

THE next few days for the two quickly passed.

Before, there had been a joy for each in a quiet walk under the trees, a ride across the mountains or a long run in the car to Melton, Wolfboro, or one of the other lakeside villages; but now, all such seemed vastly different in the new view of life that had opened before them.

Gale Sewell and Jack Marsden looked infinitely wise, but held their peace, and Bob Hernald said nothing, not even to his old friend, for Meryl wished first to tell her uncle.

Of course, he endeavoured to show her the infinite propriety of *his* having a talk with Gale Sewell, but she refused to be converted to that custom of the world.

"I must tell him myself; but first, let us have a day or two when it is just our secret."

And he agreed, world-wise man that he was, and they lived under the delusion it was just *their* secret.

Then came the news that Marsden was coming back, and once more Bob Hernald's fears seized upon him.

He had put aside any misgivings in his new-found joy, and so the message Jack received—it came from his father, who was in Boston—startled him strangely.

It was like the sounding of some old-forgotten chord, a chord strangely discordant.

He seemed to recall vaguely all his past fears, and then a sudden joy leaped in his veins; his heart answered the quick working of the brain, and a smile, certain, confident, came to his lips.

She was his; come what might, she was his. Let Marsden's message be what it would, he would care for her—and so? Why, all was well.

After dinner on the evening the message came from Marsden, Jack made his excuses early and slipped away.

Bob Hernald walked with him down the avenue. As they paused where the path turned off, he spoke.

"Do you think he'll come over to-night?"

"I doubt it." Jack shook his head slowly. "Yet he may, when he learns how well Mr. Sewell is. Undoubtedly, the reason he wired me he was coming, and at the same time warned me to say nothing to anyone but you, was that he feared his return might excite Mr. Sewell."

"Yes, I suppose so," Bob agreed reluctantly, yet in his heart there was the thought that perhaps it meant that bad news came with him, and so the lawyer wished first to get upon the ground before letting his old friend know he had arrived.

"However," Jack suggested, "I'll tell him Mr. Sewell is up and around. In that case he may be over, provided his train gets in on time."

Jack took the path through the woods while Bob wandered back slowly toward the porch, his one thought being that at any moment Marsden would reach home, but a short way from where he waited, and that with him would come an answer to the constantly recurring doubt of the past weeks. So near would be the man, and yet he feared that the night would have to pass before he learned the result of the lawyer's mission.

And so it happened, for the evening wore away and morning came, and no one at Wilderness Lodge, beyond himself, knew that Henry Marsden had returned.

Then the morning passed, and finally, when he thought he could stand the suspense no longer, Jack Marsden came riding over to announce his father's return.

They were on the tennis court, Bob Hernald and Meryl, playing, while the gray, gaunt owner of Wilderness Lodge looked on from under the shade of a huge oak and the comfort of a large wicker chair.

"Halloa!" Jack called, as he swung from his horse and came tramping across the turf. "The governor's home, Mr. Sewell!"

The owner of Wilderness Lodge straightened suddenly, and his heavy white brows came down with a snap over his eyes.

"Indeed!" No note of surprise in the voice. "Was his trip successful?"

"Guess so. Oh, go on with your game," he called,

for Bob had stopped suddenly. "He'll be over in a bit," he added. "Didn't know you were so well. Was surprised to hear it."

"I dare say," came the dry rejoinder. "But that comes from not letting us know where he was. We couldn't keep him advised as to what was going on and how we fared here in our little foursome of good-fellowship."

"Well, he has all the news now. I just got away from a regular after-breakfast examination. I'm going over to the Club," rising. "He'll be over before long, though he may be late, as he's got one of those beastly headaches of his."

Gale Sewell nodded that he had heard, and settled back again into the depths of the chair, as Jack, with a wave to the others and a promise to come back to luncheon, strode away.

As he passed out of earshot, Gale Sewell motioned to Bob.

"You said you had not discussed Meryl's abduction or Smart with Jack?"

"Why, no. It was not really my affair——"

"Yes, to be sure." And once again Gale Sewell slipped down into the depths of his chair.

The day wore on, bringing Jack back before luncheon. Then the afternoon, dinner, and evening passed, but still Marsden senior failed to appear.

At about half-past eight Jack Marsden got to his feet.

"Don't understand where the governor is, Mr. Sewell. I supposed he would be around any moment—ought to have been here for dinner."

"Unless he wanted a special invitation," the gaunt owner of Wilderness Lodge suggested.

"Yes,"—Jack made his adieux,—"he ought to expect that." And with a laughing "good-night," and "I'll look him up and see what's happened," he started down the drive.

For an instant Bob Hernald watched him go, and then, with a call to his friend, he too got to his feet.

He had waited all day long, knowing Marsden was within reach, expecting him to turn up at any moment, and here it was late at night, and apparently the lawyer was not coming to Wilderness Lodge that evening.

The prospect of another night without the facts was too much for him to stand, and so, making his desire to walk a ways with his friend the excuse, he hurried down the steps, resolved to go to Marsden if he would not come to him.

Under the trees it was dark and the two tramped on silently to finally reach the Marsden place.

The butler met them in the hall, and his answer to Jack's question was, in a way, a relief to both.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Marsden is in the library. He has spent the day there."

"Tell him, Hicks, we are just in. I'll go get some cigars, Bob." And Jack turned to the stairs, leaving his friend alone.

The library door opened as he disappeared toward the second floor, and Bob Hernald turned to see the elder Marsden on the threshold.

"Come in, Mr. Hernald," he suggested quietly, as if he had expected the call and waited all evening for it. "Hicks, if Mr. Jack comes down tell him we will be with him before long."

Bob Hernald's eyes had not left the older man's face. Hard were they set upon it, trying to read the answer to his doubts.

But the lawyer was not possessed of tell-tale features, and even when he turned to the other in the middle of the library, offering a cigar and indicating a trinity of decanters, the smile on his thin lips was as if their meeting was nothing out of the ordinary.

"Well?" Bob demanded, refusing the whiskey and cigars with a mere shake of the head. "Well?"

"Sit down, Hernald. How is everything?"

"Sit down!" the younger man exclaimed, the words coming like an explosion from his lips. "Out with it! What did you find?"

"A great deal that will need quiet digesting; a great deal that must be gone over carefully. You *were* interested before I left, I remember, but still, I must see Mr. Sewell first before I shall feel at liberty to talk."

Marsden turned away, indifferently dismissing the whole thing, or, rather, casting a circle about himself and his information, outside of which Bob Hernald suddenly seemed left alone—dazed.

He stood staring stupidly at the other, now carelessly lighting a cigar, feeling he could not have heard him aright.

Then slowly he recovered from his surprise to see he was actually an outsider, at least so far as Marsden was concerned.

Why should he be told anything? He laughed at his own audacity, as flinging himself into a nearby chair he lighted a cigarette. All along he had counted he was of some moment, because Marsden had let him into the secret of his trip.

That, after all, hardly meant he must be told the result of it, if the lawyer had discovered matters which a stranger should not learn without Mr. Sewell's consent.

In time he would know, of that he did not doubt; and now if he should press his claim as the affianced husband—but he waved the thought aside.

Suddenly he found he could wait. He was no longer a child whose vitals gave way to the first gnaw of anxiety.

No news meant good news, so the old adage ran, and if Marsden would speak first to Mr. Sewell, who, if the news was bad was to know nothing, then it meant he was in grave doubt; had found some point that Gale Sewell alone could clear up, or he had nothing to really confirm his suspicions.

However, he would wait.

"I would have been over to-day," Marsden was

speaking, "but I had some papers to go over again before seeing Mr. Sewell."

"I'll leave you then. Finish them up, and see Mr. Sewell first thing in the morning. I only walked over with Jack, thinking perhaps you could give me some information."

"I'm sorry—but sit down." Bob had risen. "You've had a quiet time of it, Jack says. No more midnight robberies or attempted abductions?"

"No, all quiet. But we did land——" And then Bob Hernald suddenly realised Gale Sewell's suggestion, that he should not speak of Smart's visit to Wilderness Lodge, and so he stopped.

"Did land what?" Marsden questioned quickly.

"The balance of the securities," the other substituted. "Kendon and I found them in the tower, where they had been dropped—but then Hemming told you that."

"Hemming told me—found the balance," the lawyer repeated, his eyes fixed searchingly on Bob Hernald's face. "What do you mean?"

"Why, they dropped two of the packages containing the bulk of the securities," Bob explained. "Kendon and I found them, and they're safe, even if the others may be lost."

"Dropped two of the packages! How much did they get?"

"Not quite fifty thousand."

"What! They dropped the balance?"

"Yes," Bob nodded. "Luck was with us for once."

"I should say so," Marsden agreed, stirring quickly from his tense position. "Why, I judged from what your friend Hemming told me the whole had been secured. He—why, yes. He did show me a list, but I thought that—why, I understood that was as much of a list of the whole as you had."

"Oh, goodness no! Kendon had a list of the whole thing. Hemming had a list of the stolen part, that's all."

"Where's the rest?"

"Over at the Club."

"Over at the Club?"

"Yes. You see, Kendon did not want to tell Mr. Sewell about the legacy just then. I sent Kendon over here with the two packages containing the balance the very morning after the robbery, but you had gone."

"Sent Kendon over here with the balance?"

"Yes. And when he found you were gone, and he couldn't put them in your safe——"

"I see." Marsden rose to his feet with a strange, forced laugh on his lips. "You took them over to the Club and put them in that safe. Sent them here." And again he laughed, as he moved across the room.

But suddenly he stopped, and wheeling, came back, his face set.

"Well, we were lucky to lose so little," he agreed in a new tone. Then he paused, casting his eyes over the desk. "I guess I'll go over these papers again, and

I'll be over to-morrow afternoon. To-morrow morning I must go—that is, I have some business to attend to. Tell Mr. Sewell I'll be over at three."

In an absent-minded way he let Bob Hernald out into the hall, while he turned back to his desk.

"Sent them here!" he repeated again, but now there was no smile on his lips. Instead, they were set, and his narrow eyes scowled darkly.

CHAPTER XXIX

MARSDEN SPEAKS

THE next morning Bob Hernald mentioned casually at breakfast that he had seen Mr. Marsden the evening before, and that the lawyer would be over at three o'clock in the afternoon.

"You'll have to entertain him then," Gale Sewell put in promptly, "for Meryl and I have a little prearranged programme. What!" Gale Sewell chuckled at the look of surprise on Bob's face as well as Meryl's. "Have you forgotten? Then I must remind you later. Oh, Bob here isn't to know. He can smoke black cigars with Mr. Marsden until we get back."

The owner of Wilderness Lodge seemed then, and the rest of the day, too, in rare, good humour.

The silent, taciturn man of the past had disappeared since the coming of a mistress to Wilderness Lodge, yet on that day his gaiety was of an extra order.

Not so with Bob Hernald, for again had come the gnawing pains of misgiving doubt, which, in fact, were a continuance of an attack that had suddenly come upon him the night before as he walked back through the woods, after his talk with Marsden.

He asked himself why he had not insisted upon some information the night before, forgetting, as he argued

the point, that Marsden was not there before him, to turn aside his questions with plausible excuses.

Right after luncheon, when Gale Sewell had announced the purpose of the little trip planned with Meryl, a rather lame excuse in the direction of inspecting some buildings on the grounds, Bob Hernald came to a quick determination.

He saw that through Gale Sewell's absence he would be with Marsden the best part of the afternoon, and so he resolved to place himself in a position to demand more definite information.

Drawing Meryl to one side, he led her to the far end of the porch.

"Sweetheart!" he whispered. "This afternoon. You must tell him."

"Do you think——?" She hesitated, pretty confusion hers, at the very suggestion.

"Yes," Bob nodded. "Perhaps that is why he is taking you away. He may have guessed our secret and wants to give you the opportunity to speak to him."

She slipped her arm into his.

"We must not let it make too much difference. We must keep him with us."

"Always!" he agreed.

After the two had passed down the long porch toward the grounds at the right, Bob turned to the huge balconied hall, and there paused to speak to Kendon.

"You might be on the watch," he suggested. "If

Mr. Marsden comes, as he will, doubtless, in a half hour or so, show him into the library."

Then seeking the cool semi-light of the low-ceilinged room, he thought to turn over a book or two until Marsden's arrival.

But books were as much out of the question as they had been that night, seemingly now so long ago, when he had been left there by the lawyer to first receive the old servant, then hostile and disrespectful, and later to note the entrance of the man Smart through the moving bookcase.

As his mind wandered back to that evening, he took a turn down the room, and once more ran his fingers carefully over the bookshelves to determine, if possible, the means of opening it.

But the search was no more fruitful than had been many others, and at last, with some little disgust, he straightened and began to silently walk up and down the room.

As he did so his hands sought instinctively the pocket of his coat. He carried her glove with him; laughingly he had refused to give it up. "Is it not"—with great seriousness—"my property now, being yours?" And he pulled it forth from the depths of an inside pocket.

It dangled a little rumpled bit of brown, as it had that night when he first found it. Quickly his mind turned back over past events.

He who had dropped it had come to see someone at Wilderness Lodge, that was certain.

Slowly he took up his walk. Could it possibly be Gale Sewell himself? The thought had come before, and each time rejected as impossible.

Who else? Kendon was not at Wilderness Lodge that night. It must be Gale Sewell, then, for no one else——

A sound came from the hall, and Marsden's voice fell on his ear.

Marsden! And then suddenly, as the door opened and the lawyer stepped into the room, a quick rush of suspicion flashed over Bob.

Marsden was at Wilderness Lodge that night—Marsden had access to Gale Sewell's papers before anyone else; yet—the colour flew to his face as the other advanced, for surely his suspicions were unjust.

"You, Hernald. Kendon tells me Mr. Sewell is out?"

"Yes, he and his *niece*. They went for a walk."

"I see," Marsden spoke absently, as if it mattered little, and with a heavy sigh threw himself into an armchair by the desk. With his finger tips together, the two middle fingers pressed against his teeth, he sat staring vacantly at the floor.

Bob Hernald stood silent, studying the older man with strange thoughts in his mind. He felt it was wrong to entertain for an instant any such suspicion of the other, and yet as he looked back quickly over past events that suspicion could not help growing.

Yet the other was Gale Sewell's friend of years.

Surely, it was presumptuous, almost amounting to impertinence, to hold for an instant such a feeling.

Thrusting it aside, he bethought himself of what he purposed telling Mr. Marsden, to the end of securing, before Gale Sewell's return, a frank statement of what the lawyer's trip had brought forth.

With a start, Marsden looked up as Bob cleared his throat, and his hands dropped to the arms of the chair.

"Yes, of course," he nodded.

"Of course?" Bob questioned.

"Oh!" Marsden came back to earth suddenly. "Why, nothing."

Dropping into the chair across from the lawyer, Bob leaned forward.

"Mr. Sewell may be back at any moment, but before he comes there are some few things I want to say to you, Mr. Marsden; a few questions I want to ask."

"Yes." The listless manner was gone, the lawyer's usual sharp, alert air again present.

"In the first place, and to get down to the point really aimed at, and at once, what did you find out while away concerning Meryl Sewell's parentage?"

It was out, and he was glad of it. The question had been a hard one to ask, but now that he had put it his eyes met the lawyer's squarely, quite prepared to insist upon an answer and to sustain his rights thereto.

"What did I find while I was away?" Marsden turned slightly toward the other. "Why?"

"Because I am naturally interested," Bob answered, deciding to secure the information if possible without divulging the fact of his engagement. "Because when you went away no one but ourselves, I supposed, knew of the purpose of your journey. Mr. Sewell knows nothing. Do you want to speak to him first, before you tell me anything? If it's good news, why, out with it, man. If it's bad news, I am the one to hear it first, for she must never know, nor he either. It would kill them both."

"You," Marsden repeated, picking certain words from the other's rather excited speech, "you are the one to hear it first. Why?"

"Why?" Bob Hernald hesitated just an instant. Then he leaned forward a bit closer. "Because Meryl Sewell is my affianced wife!"

The lawyer, by far the cooler of the two, never changed a muscle at the announcement, but continued to stare fixedly at the other.

"I see," he finally nodded. "I thought of such an outcome when I left. But Jack said nothing."

"Jack knows nothing. Meryl is speaking to her uncle to-day. I am telling you because I must have some satisfactory account of your trip."

"Engaged," Marsden repeated in such a low tone that the word could hardly be heard. "Engaged." His eyes narrowed, and then suddenly he seemed to straighten as if the time for action had come.

"Yes," Bob agreed, "and don't you think that that

is sufficiently good ground upon which to ask for this information? "

Slowly Marsden inclined his head, and then with a quick movement, rose to his feet.

Up and down the long room he paced. Once, twice, then again, and on his return to the table the fourth time he stopped.

"I've been puzzled ever since I went away," he began, speaking slowly, as if it was the beginning of a complete statement of facts, "puzzled to know what to do if I found my fears well founded. I got back yesterday, and refrained from coming over because I was still in doubt as to my course. I don't know what to do. I am between two horns of the dilemma."

Slowly, half-dazed, Bob Hernald gained his feet to stand towering down upon the other, a flush mounting his cheeks, for in the lawyer's words he seemed to read his answer.

"You hesitate"—he licked his lips, they were dry and parched—"you hesitate because you found——"

Slowly Marsden's head moved again.

"Yes. I found—I found what I feared to find. She is not Joseph Sewell's daughter!"

CHAPTER XXX

TERMS

THE room seemed suddenly to grow black, and yet Bob Hernald took the blow without moving a muscle. The fingers of his left hand reached out to the table, and just barely touched it, as if to steady himself. Again he touched his lips with his tongue, as the two stood facing each other.

"The proof!" he demanded, and now in his voice there was a ring that meant his fighting spirit was awake.

With a quick turn, the lawyer moved to the desk, and out of the depths of his pocket produced a package of papers.

"It would be impossible, almost, for me to show them to Gale Sewell—but to you, well, it's hard enough, Hernald, yet you are a younger man and can take the blow better than he. Too, you may see a way to prevent the facts passing beyond you."

But Bob Hernald hardly heard. With a quick step, he had the papers in his own hands.

A burial certificate—two affidavits.

Oh, what misery the world could hold! How quickly the pendulum could swing from seemingly fair sky and sunshine! How little would turn the balance of laughter to salt tears!

Bob Hernald read of how Meryl Sewell had died, a child of five.

"You see,"—Marsden spoke slowly as Bob turned from the last sheet,—"it is as I feared. When I reached Ireland I looked up this cousin of Kendon's and found his statements were fair enough, and agreed with Kendon's story. He took me to the convent, and there I questioned the Mother Superior. Everything seemed correct, and I believed I must be wrong. As I started to leave, almost as I reached the door, I put a last question. I asked it by the merest chance. The Mother Superior's answer changed the whole aspect of the matter."

"Yes?" Bob Hernald hardly realised he spoke.

"Meryl Sewell, the one we know as Meryl Sewell, was brought to the convent not by the nurse Joseph Sewell had left her with, but by another woman——"

"And she?"

"Was Mrs. Sewell's illegitimate sister."

"You mean——"

"Wait!" Marsden paused as he swallowed quickly. "I found her, and finally she told me of how the maid, Mary Farland, had come to her when she returned to Ireland with Joseph Sewell's daughter. Her child was but little older than Meryl Sewell, and at the maid's urging she had taken both children to bring up."

"And Joseph Sewell's daughter——?"

"Died at the age of five." Marsden motioned to the papers. "That fact is she had not dared to tell Mary

Farland when she came back, but instead, had said it was her daughter. Then, as it is set forth," again Marsden indicated the affidavits, "her child was placed in the convent under the name of Meryl Sewell."

"And the father?"

"As the affidavits state, Joseph Sewell."

For an instant, Bob Hernald stared, hardly realising Marsden had ceased speaking, and then dropped into a nearby chair.

As he regained his wits his first thought was that really it made no difference, for Meryl, or she whom he knew and loved as Meryl, would bear his name.

Gathering the papers in his hands he faced the lawyer.

"They must be burnt!"

For a moment the older man eyed him coldly.

"You mean," he suggested, biting his under lip, "Gale Sewell must never know?"

"Yes—that she must never know."

"Show me how. I want to see the way, if I can."

"If you can!" Bob Hernald cried. "You must! There is no *if* in it at all!"

He rose suddenly and his chair creaked ponderously as he pushed it back against the table. Thus the opening of the hall door and the entrance of the one under discussion was neither heard nor noted by the two men.

Meryl paused an instant at the threshold until her eyes became accustomed to the dim light of the room,

and then as she started to move forward, saw the two men.

Recognising Mr. Marsden, she drew back, for she had come to find the man she loved to tell him of her talk with her uncle.

The door was across the room, the long curtains to one of the French windows close at hand, and with a quick movement she sought shelter behind them, thinking to find the window itself open and thus easily to gain the porch.

The window, however, was closed, and as she would have turned back into the room, Bob Hernald spoke:

"I tell you, Marsden, she must never know of this!"

"She must never know of this." The words forced themselves upon her lips unuttered, and she paused, clinging to the curtains, her eyes gazing out to the broad piazza, and so she stood, hardly breathing—hardly knowing she listened.

"How to prevent? I tell you that has been the question haunting me night and day," Marsden answered slowly.

"Burn them! My God, man, if I had gone in your place and found them," he shook the papers and the thick sheets rattled, "I'd have lost them—forgotten that I had ever found them—forgotten that I had ever been to Ireland!"

"Perhaps you would have, your personal self would have, but as a lawyer, Hernald, even you would not have withheld those affidavits."

The younger man seemed to stir suddenly, and a new look, troubled, doubtful, came into his eyes. Was there another side to this beyond the personal note? Such a thought had not occurred to him as possible.

"You see," Marsden hurried on, "you would have done what I did in my place." He drove the point home as if asking vindication from the other. "Even you, when you found she was not Meryl Sewell—that Meryl Sewell was dead—would have been bound to get the facts in what shape you could and bring them to your client."

The girl in the window-alcove moved, seemingly, for the first time. That up to now they were speaking of her she seemed to feel, but with this last speech, her body seemed stricken dumb. Only her ears were alert to catch each word. Somebody else stood there where she stood, she was not Meryl Sewell.

"My God, man, I'll not argue that point!" Bob Hernald gained his feet fiercely. "I'm retained by you in Mr. Sewell's behalf, and I say he must never know the contents of these papers. Meryl must never know."

She stirred for the first time and the blood seemed to leap into her cheeks.

He still spoke of her as "Meryl." Then there must be some hideous mistake. She possibly had not understood aright.

But Marsden was speaking again, and she hung to the curtain straining her ears.

"I tell you once more, I want to see a way to do what you suggest. It's no matter for snap judgment, no matter for biassed thought. Much hangs on what we do now. Sit down, Hernald. Clear your brain and discuss this thing rationally, forgetting for a moment your own desires."

"Forgetting!" Bob Hernald flung out sarcastically, while his hand swept across his high forehead, an old familiar gesture of his. "Forgetting!" But he dropped into a chair by the table, and with both elbows resting upon it held his head in his hands.

"We can keep this from Gale Sewell," Marsden began, "that seems easy, for as deeply into the thing as I can go I can see no harm coming from both of them going on for the present under old conditions—without knowing the facts. In some ways it would be best for her to be told. She might go on then, still playing her part."

She was playing a part! She was not Meryl Sewell! The girl in the alcove hardly breathed.

"The real trouble, Hernald, would come, you must see that it is the real point, after Gale Sewell's death. He will leave all his property to her. But there is this legacy of Joseph Sewell's—that Kendon will want to turn over to her. How are we to keep her from accepting this money? As Gale Sewell's attorney, I can't sit by and see him will his property to one who has no legal claim to it, and what's more,"—Marsden leaned across the table suddenly,—"she wouldn't want to touch a

penny of it, and you wouldn't want her to do so when it didn't belong to her."

Bob Hernald dropped his hands flat upon the table and sat up straight.

New phases seemed to crop up every instant. Of course she wouldn't want the money, it not being hers. Of course he wouldn't think of her taking it, and Marsden was perfectly right in feeling he could not sit by knowing the truth and allow such a thing to be done.

Oh, how muddled his head felt! and then suddenly he seemed to see light.

"If the estate was to lose nothing, if Meryl was to have this money and an equivalent was to be returned, do you understand?"

"You mean, let the matter stand as it is, she to go on believing that she is Meryl Sewell, and you, when Gale Sewell dies, to turn back dollar for dollar to the estate for every cent she receives from it?"

"Yes. Yet then you would have the estate, or wait —has Gale Sewell made a will?"

"I think he has," the reply came hesitatingly.

"Then that would be set aside by any he made in her favour."

"Yes."

"Then I'll bind myself to pay dollar for dollar to those named in this first will all that they would have received——"

"Or," Marsden suggested, "we could suppress the last will." And then he paused, for suddenly Bob Her-

nald shot a glance at him full of question, and he added quickly: "But your suggestion is the best. It would not hold in law, you could break from it."

"But you know I would not."

"It would spare them all," Marsden nodded. "She need never know, Gale Sewell can live the balance of his days in peace, believing he has found the daughter of the woman he loved. It will settle everything."

"Yes," Bob agreed, rising, his eyes upon the other, the suspicion that had come to him before suddenly growing stronger.

"And nothing will be said to Mr. Sewell," the lawyer put in.

"No, nothing. Get the necessary papers ready for me to sign—yet, wait! To whom had Mr. Sewell left his fortune in this will already drawn?"

Before Marsden could make answer, a sound at the further end of the room caused both to turn suddenly.

"Meryl!" Bob cried, unable to move, realising that she must have heard all, and that his effort to guard her against a knowledge of her birth had come to naught.

She smiled upon him, and no one to see her then would have thought she had listened to the conversation of the two and had finally, realising in a dumb way that she was not Meryl Sewell, stirred herself to action when the one she loved was about to sacrifice his fortune for her peace of mind.

"I came in by chance. I don't know why I listened, but I did. What is it, please?"

Marsden turned to Bob, a helpless look on his face.

"It is nothing!" Bob urged quickly. "Mr. Marsden has been away——"

"And found that I am not Meryl Sewell; that I am someone else. You did not want me to know, you were trying to keep it from me!"

"To save you, Meryl!" Bob cried, thinking she was accusing him of keeping from her what she should have been told.

"I understand," she whispered, "but now I want to know all—I must know all."

Her head was held high, there was a look on her face that demanded the whole truth.

"I fear," Marsden had risen and come forward, "that she must be told. It seems the only way."

With a cry Bob turned fiercely upon the lawyer, but before he could speak Meryl was at his side, her hand upon his arm.

"He is right, Bob, I *must* be told."

"Must!" he cried, turning to her pleadingly, feeling unable to stop the tide setting so strongly against his desires.

"Yes," she repeated, "I must be told."

"Then let me explain," he urged, his voice almost breaking.

"I must be told everything," she whispered.

"Yes," he bowed his head, "I will tell you all—all, sweetheart."

CHAPTER XXXI

WHO AM I?

THEY passed slowly from the library and down the broad piazza to the far end.

"Sit here, dearest," he whispered, moving a chair close to a small table, while he dropped wearily into one on the other side.

Neither had spoken since leaving Marsden, and now Bob, who had been trying to force his seemingly inactive brain to work, realised he must tell her all that he would have kept hidden.

"I want you to be very, very plain," she urged. "I must know everything. Of course I realise that you would have shielded me—perhaps it would have been best that way, but now as I have heard so much I must have it all explained."

She spoke calmly, a smile on her lips, no sign of anxiety; no fear of the blow that might fall, whatever shape it took.

"There is little to tell you, Meryl, beyond what you have heard." He spoke slowly, his voice sounding strange even to his own ears. "It seems Mr. Marsden searched for you a great many years ago, and as he failed to find you then, he was surprised when you returned with Kendon. As your uncle's attorney, he felt

it his duty to make sure you were Joseph Sewell's daughter. When he left here four weeks ago he went to Ireland and to the convent where you had lived. The search he made seems to indicate that Joseph's Sewell's daughter died when a child of five; that you, for some reason, were given her name and have since then been known as Meryl Sewell."

"Then I am not Meryl Sewell at all?" She smiled sadly while his troubled gaze rested on her calm face, and he marvelled that she accepted his words so quietly. Why did she not declare it all false?

"So it seems."

"And Mr. Marsden feared I would stay on as Meryl Sewell, and so get Mr. Sewell's money? That was what I understand from your talk with him."

"Yes,—but that can all be arranged,—in fact, it has been arranged."

"It can be arranged, of course. I can arrange that now that I know the truth."

"I have arranged it, dearest. That phase is nothing."

"No, nothing!" she agreed, turning and looking at him almost vacantly. "And you were not going to tell Mr. Sewell?"

"We feared it might kill him. You see, he was ill before you came. It was partially because of his worry over you."

"Yes. He has said a great deal to me. I think I understand that. You see," she added almost wistfully.

"I just want to understand it all so as to know what I must do."

"Yes," he agreed, yet wondering vaguely that he could be talking so calmly with her on the subject.

"And you must tell me what I am to do."

"We will decide what is best, sweetheart, you and I; but don't you see, you have all your life been Meryl Sewell, since you were five at least, and so it is best to go on just as if this had never happened. Let Mr. Sewell know nothing of it at all, and soon, dearest, you will have another name—my name."

"What is my real name? Who am I?"

He started as if struck, hesitated and gazed helplessly at her.

"You do not know?"

"I didn't ask, but that can be traced. That will be looked up later."

"Why do I look so much like Mrs. Sewell?"

"Why do you——" But he could not finish. He felt as if he was in deep water, floundering hopelessly.

The fact that she was not Meryl Sewell he had failed to keep from her, but the truth concerning her parentage must never reach her ears. Yet what answer could he give her now?

"Why, sweetheart, that's only a coincidence."

"But it must answered. There is something underneath this likeness, and I must know the whole truth. Could Mrs. Sewell have been my mother?"

"Why—no, but what put such a thought into your

head? Why——" But he paused suddenly, seeing that his quick denial was likely to make her cling to the idea rather than to give it up.

"I was only trying to account for the likeness. There must be a reason."

"Perhaps your mother was some relative of Mrs. Sewell's. Perhaps——"

"Perhaps,"—a pause—"I don't know why, only—only it seems as if I was very, very lonely."

"But, dear heart," he was on his feet, his arms about her, "it cannot last. The past may seem so, as we look back, but the future—the future, darling, just you and me."

She drew gently away and slowly she shook her head, her eyes holding his.

"Not until we search the past, Bob; not until I know the whole truth."

"You mean——?" And his heart cried out in his words.

"Oh, Bob, don't you see?" She threw out both hands to him, but before he could speak, or take her in his arms, a step sounded on the porch, and Gale Sewell came slowly toward them.

CHAPTER XXXII

GALE SEWELL SHOWS HIS HAND

Both turned and faced the older man and Meryl's eyes cleared like a flash, the mists gone, and over her lips was the old merry laughing smile, yet underneath, to the quick eyes of the man who loved her deeply, the true heart was plain.

"Bob," Gale Sewell held the other's hand in a grip of great good will. "She has told me. She is happy; so am I."

Oh, the irony of it all, to have their first congratulations come at such a moment.

Yet it was made easy, for Gale Sewell drew Bob quickly to one side.

"I must take you away for a moment. You wait, Meryl. I'll send him back very soon."

She nodded, still the smile on her lips, but as she sank into the huge chair it was as if, as she said, she was very, very lonely.

Gale Sewell led the way to the huge hall, and paused an instant before the library door.

"Mr. Marsden is here. I have to see him for a few minutes and I wish you to be present."

Bob nodded, puzzled at the sudden change in the

other's face, for where before he had seemed care free, the lines were hard, the face set and stern.

Again Bob found himself seated by the huge table. There before him were the documents. He drew them to him. As he did so he became conscious of the fact that Marsden was eying him in some doubt, a question on his lips.

He pulled himself together sufficiently to seize upon the situation, and then in a dull way he understood the other's look.

He sat straight very suddenly, for he saw what was meant, and shook his head quickly to indicate that he had not spoken to Gale Sewell. He realised, too, that there was some purpose out of the common in this meeting, and he tried to pay attention to Gale Sewell's words, even with all his thoughts on the poor, lonely little girl left on the wide porch.

"I've asked Mr. Hernald to join us for just a few minutes. I want to go back a bit. There are some few things that have happened since I was taken ill, since you went away"—he inclined his head toward Marsden—"that can be cleared up in a few moments. I should like to clear them up at once."

Bob Hernald dropped back into his chair in disappointment. The old riddle again. What if it was to be cleared up? That was of absolutely no importance now.

"In the first place," Gale Sewell went on, his voice even, cold and hard, "you of course know of my niece's

abduction from Wolfboro, and of her being held in the farmhouse there on the Larmer road?"

Gale Sewell's tall, loosely hung body leaned far over the table, his elbows upon it, one lank finger waving out before him like a miniature derrick. His eyes glistened fiercely from out the depths of their sunken sockets under the massive white eyebrows.

Marsden nodded slowly, studying his friend in sharp perplexity.

"I see! And you know of Kendon's being held on the mountain side three days, until rescued by Mr. Hernald?"

"Of course I do. I spoke with you about it."

"And then there is the discovery of Meryl by Mr. Hernald. He bound up one of these men, the other got away, then he brought Meryl and me back here. You were told of that?"

"Why, yes. I went up there after the men myself."

"But didn't find them?"

"No. They had evidently got away."

Gale Sewell paused for an instant, and Bob Hernald leaned forward upon the table, for suddenly it struck him that there was a far deeper significance in the questions being put by the owner of Wilderness Lodge than he had suspected. That strange misgiving that had come to his mind twice before returned, and he cast a quick glance at Marsden's profile.

Gale Sewell leaned forward again; the pause had only been for an instant.

"Then you heard of the robbery, of Kendon's losing a part of my brother's legacy,—yes, you heard of that?"

"I did."

"Tell him about your trip to Boston."

Gale Sewell swung quickly about in his chair, and the suddenness of his request startled Bob Hernald, as well as Mr. Marsden. The lawyer turned like a flash in his chair.

"Your trip to Boston?" he demanded. "I thought your friend Hemming went to Boston."

"He did, but Mr. Hernald went also," Gale Sewell answered.

"But why?" Turning to Bob, "I thought——"

"That nothing was to be done, according to your instructions to Mr. Hemming?" Gale Sewell inquired.

"Which were your instructions to me, Gale," Marsden answered quickly.

"True, but I told you then that as soon as I got well I should look into the matter. *Do you remember that?*" Gale Sewell was leaning across the table, his long, gaunt neck stretched out, his hatchet-like face, the protruding eyebrows, the heavy moustache, seemingly reaching out toward the other.

"Yes, I do."

"You should have remembered it sooner. You might have thought I would look into this when she was concerned; that I wouldn't leave *that* entirely to you."

Marsden moved slowly to the edge of his chair. His

tongue touched his lips. Perhaps it was the light, but his face seemed to grow a shade paler.

"What do you mean?" he questioned.

"Tell him of your trip to Boston," Gale Sewell made answer, with a gesture toward Bob as he dropped back into the depths of his chair.

"Why," Bob Hernald began as Marsden turned to him with an angry light in his eyes, "I got a message from Hemming, telling me what you had told him——"

"To do nothing," Marsden broke in.

"Yes, and I should have done nothing further but that day Mr. Sewell took charge of the affair."

"Oh!" And Marsden dropped back into his chair, but his eyes did not turn to Gale Sewell's face again.

"At his direction," Bob hurried on, "I went to Boston that night, and found Mr. Smart at the Parker House, where Hemming had followed him. He returned with me here."

"Returned with you!" Marsden's face was pale now, and he sat up quickly, though there was a slope to his shoulders and his eyes were wavering.

"Why did he return with you?" Gale Sewell asked quickly.

"Because I suggested you would like to talk with Mr. Kerveil."

"Mr. Kerveil was, years ago, Mr. Marsden's partner," Gale Sewell announced, turning to Bob Hernald and speaking as if he was giving the most matter of fact information imaginable.

CHAPTER XXXIII

BURNT PAPERS

THE words came like an electric shock to Bob Hernald. He started to speak, hesitated and turned toward Marsden.

Who else could fit into his theory concerning the kidnapping as well as Marsden? Yet Marsden had brought him into this matter. Ah! Had the lawyer seen that he would not rest contented until Meryl was found, and so purposely placed him where he would be able to look after his acts and guide him far afield from the truth?

There was a farmhouse on the Larmer road. Marsden had gone there and found no one. The robbery. It happened the very night Marsden went away. But why hadn't Smart, or Kerveil, warned him?

Gale Sewell leaned forward. "Is it enough? Mr. Marsden, I never expected you to come back. I let Kerveil go, and supposed he would warn you. I told him to do so. I supposed that you would write Jack—that your health was poor; that you were going away for a while."

Marsden was on his feet, an angry light in his eyes. "You—you accuse me! You say I have done this?"

Slowly, like an avenging being, Gale Sewell rose to his full height.

"You deny it?"

"I deny—is it necessary that I should? To think, man, that you would take Kerveil's word before mine! To think that I, while away, am accused, and you so open and ready to believe!"

Bob Hernald's eyes travelled slowly from the lawyer to Gale Sewell. He himself had been only too ready to believe the worst of Marsden, yet had not Gale Sewell jumped at conclusions?

"Marsden, you and I have known each other for years. You know me—I know you. Do I readily doubt my friends? Answer that in your own heart. Do I jump hastily at conclusions? Answer that in your own heart. Kerveil I know, and realise he would lie—compromising you or anyone else to gain his end. But Kerveil was here, and I talked with him an hour nearly."

"And accepted his lies, his story, without a question! Believed him when he accused me!"

"Believed him, yes. Do you know your handwriting? I do. There,"—a package of letters was tossed upon the table,—"there are your letters to Kerveil. You should have arranged such an affair by word of mouth—you should have known they would some day turn up, if in no other way, at least, in Kerveil's hands, to blackmail you with. You can thank God I took them from him, and when I give them to you, you have your answer as to whether I thought of you as I learned of your perfidy."

The lawyer's eyes wavered for an instant. Slowly his

hand reached out toward the package, and as quickly drew back, and then his tongue touched his lips slowly.

Dead silence was upon the three standing about the table.

Suddenly Bob Hernald remembered, and with a cry he was close to Marsden, the affidavits in his hand.

"These!" he cried. "Are these another part of your schemes?"

Slowly, as if sad and weary, Marsden raised his eyes, and then the colour leaped to his cheeks and the flash in his eyes matched that in the younger man's.

"Don't *you* judge me!"

"My God, man, they are lies!" Bob Hernald was so close upon the other that he nearly forced him to give ground. "You—you would have placed this stain upon her! You coward!"

"Wait!" Gale Sewell's voice rang out. "What is it?" He had been a silent witness to Bob Hernald's outbreak, wondering vaguely, as he could think above the dull pain of destroyed friendship, what added account the younger man could be heaping upon his old friend's head.

Marsden wheeled defiantly, and with an oath threw the papers Bob held upon the table. "Read! I'd have spared you that! But you accuse me of perfidy—accuse me on the word of a scoundrel—a package of forged letters. Now read and learn the truth!"

With one glance, Gale Sewell saw their import.

"Does she know?" he cried, thinking first of Meryl.

"She overheard us while we were arranging matters so that she and you need never learn of it."

"Never learn of it!—Ah!" And with a cry he turned back to Marsden. "You'd rob her of her father's legacy while I lived, doing it by the hand of paid scoundrels, and in *this* way, because Bob Hernald trusted you, you'd rob her of what was mine, when I was gone. You—you——" And then the voice broke. "My God, man! What did I ever do to you?"

"Nothing!" Again Marsden's anger was up. "But what you are doing now—doubting me because a man you know is a scoundrel drags my name down to help himself! Because I bring you news you'd rather not hear."

For an instant Gale Sewell considered—just an instant. "Marsden," his voice was cold, "why did you break with Joseph Sewell?"

"Why—I—what has that to do with this?"

"My brother wrote me—wrote me on his deathbed, of how you bled him, and how you finally, for a certain sum, agreed to say nothing to the woman he and I loved—the mother of Meryl, of his folly when in Ireland. He only told me of that when he came to die. I suppose he did not dare speak of it before, for fear I'd not believe him, in my friendship for you. But you did that—you blackmailed him and now you'd use that same woman to damn the fair name of one more dear to me than life itself."

"Your——"

"No, I'm not wrong." Gale Sewell's voice came strong. "Who, Marsden, but you learned of Joseph Sewell's legacy by rifling my safe when I was ill? Who but you robbed me in the Rockville mines?"

"And you too!" Bob Hernald could hold silent no longer. "You get a parcel of lies together to try and break her heart! You——"

Gale Sewell was between them, for Bob would have struck the lawyer in his rage.

Sweeping Marsden to one side, the owner of Wilderness Lodge held the three documents before him.

"Marsden, for Jack's sake, I would have spared you this. Go your way now with the truth upon your lips or I shall forget the past—forget my love for your son. Marsden," the voice was now appealing, "for Jack's sake, have done with it. You could only win by my being kept in ignorance, for even if she is not their daughter, she can still be my heir."

For an instant the lawyer, seemingly years older than a brief half-hour ago, stood silent. He seemed hardly to breathe as, finally, he took the papers in Gale Sewell's hands slowly between his shaking fingers and tore them across the middle.

"They're false!" he muttered, as they fell to the floor.

"False!" Gale Sewell nodded, "and just for money you would have done this thing." There was sadness in his words.

"Just for money," Marsden nodded, broken now;

"just for what we all slave for—just for what hearts are broken—murder done. Yes, I would have done it just for money!"

Slowly the owner of Wilderness Lodge struck a match and lighted the sheets. As they burned crisp and black in the huge fireplace, the three, silent as death, watched them crumple and curl. Then Gale Sewell turned.

"I believe you were thinking of Jack all the time. Blood, one's own blood, is pretty strong!" Out shot the gaunt hand. "Good-bye!"

For an instant Marsden hesitated, and then, the light of gladness in his eyes, he grasped the hand of the man whom he had honestly thought of, even as he had made his plans.

The grasp was given back, and with one look into the gray gaunt eyes, he turned and passed slowly from the library.

Gale Sewell watched him go, watched the door through which he passed long after it had closed. Finally he turned.

"She is waiting for you. Go tell her we have burnt the past." He motioned toward the hearth where the black, crumbling papers lay. "And in the burning, established the future. I must be alone a little while. I must part with my past, for *only* the future is before me. In a half-hour she—she and you may come to me, then will we plan for the days to come."

Down the long porch Bob Hernald hurried and the

look on his face brought Meryl to her feet, a question in her eyes.

He had her in her arms, and holding her close, quickly told her all.

"There is a future, then—there is?" And the light in her eyes, so deep, and true, made the blood leap in his veins as he held her to him, her lips to his.

"A future, dearest one—a future for you and me!"

THE END